# POLYHEDRON

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RPGA NETWORK

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# The Only Constant...

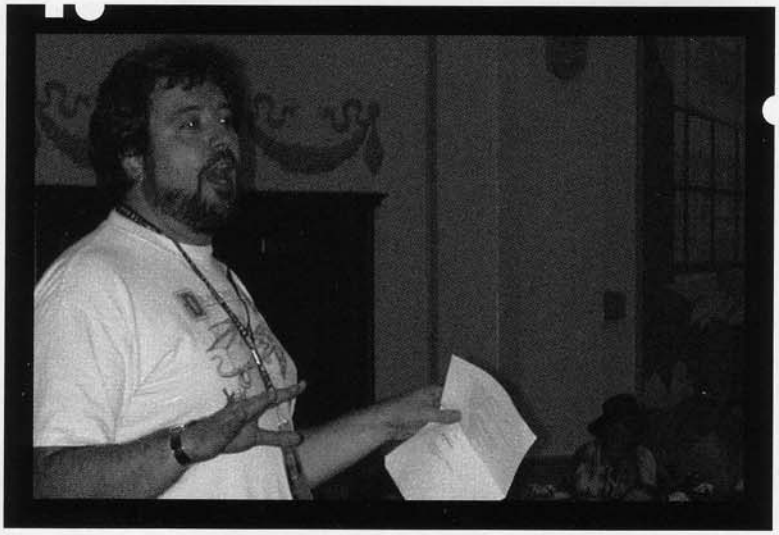
## THE STATE OF THE NETWORK

This is a writeup of remarks I made at the GEN CON® Game Fair members' meeting, which took place on the Wednesday evening preceding the show. As we needed to keep it short, and the man with the sound system was a bit late setting up, my remarks were fairly general, and I urged the members to keep an eye on our Web site for more details and updates. Wizards of the Coast recently brought in more staff to help the Web Team, so our site is more up to date and will continue to improve in the upcoming months. In the meantime, you can always direct specific questions to us at rpgahq@wizards.com, if you don't find the information you seek on the Web site.

As many of you know, it's been a wild ride for WotC and the RPGA® Network in the year since I last addressed the membership at GEN CON. At that time, WotC had been in the thick of the POKÉMON® boom for a couple years, and there seemed to be no end in sight. We had just released the game in Europe, with expectations of the same fad phenomenon that had swept the U.S. The entire business had been growing by leaps and bounds, expanding operations in every part of the company, and making ambitious plans to grow all of our businesses aggressively with profits that almost felt like lottery winnings.

The reality turned out to be a bit different. The European market didn't go as crazy for POKÉMON as we expected, and meanwhile the U.S. market began to cool down to a more realistic size. POKÉMON is still a major piece of the WotC business, but it's not as impossibly huge as it used to be, and those days of what seemed like money raining from the skies upon WotC are over, at least for the time being. As a result, the business found itself in a position where it needed to shrink its expenses to remain in line with its new income expectations. Many parts of the WotC business reduced in size quite logically as a reflection of new, smaller demands upon numerous departments. However, the whole company had been growing fat upon the proceeds from POKÉMON, so the whole company had to share in the financial diet that would reduce it to a healthier size, and the RPGA was no exception.

The first and most obvious changes took place last December, when the company went through a round of downsizing across the board. The RPGA's losses were fairly minimal, compared to the rest of the company, but they hurt nonetheless. We were forced to eliminate Tom Ko's branch manager position, and our European branch manager, Ann Van Dam, was reassigned to other duties, retaining only a few hours each week to service RPGA operations. Tom had been the glue that held member services together, and all of the rest of us had to pitch in to cover his duties, while doing our best to continue with our own jobs, which had already kept us busier than a modest 50-hour work week would allow. Very quickly, things got out of control. Meanwhile, the loss of budget and Ann's services forced us to back away from several growth initiatives planned for the European Community (as well as the rest of the globe), and we decided for the short term that we should focus on the existing Network rather than continue to seek more growth.



To complicate matters, we had agreed to convert the LIVING CITY™—RAVENS BLUFF campaign to Third Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® rules on an accelerated schedule, and the job turned out to be a great deal more complicated than we believed. We were beset with technological setbacks in the cert database, and the short deadline put us into such a rush that we made mistakes. Although we were given additional budget dollars for the job, they weren't sufficient for the whole job, and requests for additional funds were denied, so we were forced to continue with the conversion—often starting over from scratch—as an extra project, on top of our other duties. Time, it turned out, was the resource we needed most. By February, the process had broken down so completely that we decided to print an entire second set of converted certs, often including erroneous or incorrectly assigned certs, and send them out to the members in an attempt to finally get everyone's certs into their hands. As some of you know, the process is still not complete. The job goes on, and will continue until it's done.

All of this happened, mind you, after the size of the Network had tripled, and overall RPGA gaming activity had doubled, since the year before. We had launched two new major campaigns—the LIVING GREYHAWK™ and LIVING FORCE™ campaigns—and we had increased *Polyhedron*'s page count and taken it to full color while adding the *Living Greyhawk Journal*. Suddenly, in the midst of all this, we had much less resources with which to serve a lot more members. If you're one of the many members who sent email or called and received no response, we apologize profusely and beg you to understand that it wasn't for lack of desire to help you. For a while there, we were simply overwhelmed.

Amidst these trials and tribulations, I was given additional duties. I was promoted to a directorship and put in charge of licensing for the RPG business. This has forced me to restructure the business so that I'm now more strictly a strategic manager and less of a tactician. I've been forced to redefine job responsibilities for my entire staff so that they can do the ground work while I spend my days "thinking big thoughts," making business plans, and giving my staff more work to do! As we move forward, I will tend to fade into the background of RPGA activities, even though I'll still be there—pulling strings, directing new programs, and fighting for the Network on the executive level.

Throughout all the changes, we've never stopped working, and we've never given up. It may not seem like it from an outside perspective, but WotC has never stopped caring about the RPGA, and we've been busy restructuring HQ operations in order to keep the Network alive and strong. Many changes are going to manifest shortly, if you haven't already noticed them, and we hope to show you many more improvements in the coming months. We've brought in a new clerk, named Tim Kelley, who is taking care of all the little things that can pile up and crush the Network if they're not handled promptly, and that's freed the rest of us to concentrate on our own goals and duties. Furthermore, the RPG business—including the games, magazines, books, and RPGA—is now under the new leadership of Mary Kirchoff, who has been a part of the industry so long that she was actually the first editor of *Polyhedron* Magazine, back in the early 1980s. Mary has reunited most of the business functions formerly known as "TSR, Inc." under one banner, and the mission going forward will be to integrate the business so that each category supports the others wherever possible, and that's a great thing. Some of the things I'll talk about below will reflect this new (old) strategy, and I think you'll like the results.

Under the new business structure, the RPGA is moving more intently toward the Internet, in order to more fully globalize its operations and to deliver services that don't require as much manpower on the part of the staff. We are already capable of online score reporting, and our goal is to make manual reporting the rare exception rather than the standard practice. Memberships are now being processed through our e-commerce store, which is capable of providing much more automated and professional processing, and we will be adding new services in the near future, made possible through this partnership with e-commerce. (More about that below.)

Since we want to use this system globally, and because of the requests and interests of many members who have written to us, we're making it as easy to join the RPGA as possible. Therefore, we've changed the cost of membership to just $5 USD, which makes it much more affordable worldwide. People all over the world can use a credit card to join, and the equivalent of $5 USD will be charged to them in their respective currencies. For that $5, the following services will be delivered:

- A membership card.
- Access to the electronic network: This is essentially entrance to a passworded area where all your member information is stored, where the scenario library rests, and where we will make additional benefits available to the members.
- Access to the scenario library: Some good news for you here. We've changed the cost of a scenario to $5 if it's part of a premiere RPGA campaign, such as the LIVING CITY, LIVING GREYHAWK, or LIVING FORCE campaigns, and only $3 if it's part of a member-run campaign.

· Points tracking: We'll continue to track player and judge points, as always. We're planning to roll out a new program that gives real value to those points, so stay tuned for more details.
· Playtesting privileges: We're working on improving this system, to make it more valuable to both members and the WotC R&D staff.

**Those who want to continue to receive *Polyhedron* Magazine will be charged an additional $25 USD, simulating the traditional GUILD-LEVEL™ membership.**

Note that we're eliminating the GUILD and FELLOWSHIP™ categories of membership. Instead, we'll classify your membership status as "Magazine" if you've ordered it. Those of you who have paid for GUILD-LEVEL membership will continue to receive your subscriptions until your membership expires, at which time you may choose to continue subscribing as an option. Also, those folks who wish to play in an RPGA game without joining at all may do so: We'll record and store their points, but they won't have access to them, and won't be able to take advantage of any member services, unless they join the Network, at which time their points will fully "activate." I neglected to explain the following information at the members' meeting, but allow me to correct that error here. Erik Mona has moved into the Periodicals Department and will continue to work on RPGA publications from there. This will allow us to use that department's full-service operations, which will result in highly professional publication standards and faster, more reliable delivery. We're also making some physical format changes: After a year of separate publication, the *Living Greyhawk Journal* is going to become a regular feature of *Dragon* Magazine. This is a great thing, in my opinion, because it makes the *Living Greyhawk* campaign an integral part of the D&D experience. I've spoken to the head of the Periodicals Department, Johnny Wilson, about offering a discount on *Dragon* subscriptions to RPGA members, and he thinks it's a great idea, so stay tuned for that probable deal. (This is one of those new, integrated business strategies to which I alluded above.) Meanwhile, *Polyhedron* and *Dungeon* Magazines are going to combine into a single periodical with a flip-cover format (*Poly* on one side and *Dungeon* on the other), as of the December issue. That means members will get even more magazine for their money than ever before.

With the format change, *Polyhedron* becomes Wizards of the Coast's official d20 magazine as well as the magazine of record for the RPGA Network. In addition to support for RPGA activities, conventions, and LIVING™ campaigns, look for coverage of Wizards d20 offerings such as *Call of Cthulhu* and *Wheel of Time*, as well as interesting d20 applications from the multitude of third-party d20 publishers. Each issue will feature a complete stand-alone d20 game or setting, which will be supported with adventures in the extensive RPGA scenario database. The d20 revolution has swept interest in gaming into a frenzy, and we're proud that *Polyhedron* will soon be at the center of the storm.

In terms of future services, here are some of the things we plan to add to the members' site, as quickly as possible. Bear in mind that we're still working on these plans, and we can't promise they'll be available until we actually launch them.

**Book club:** Here's another one of those integrated business plans. The Books Department will create a club for the novel readers among the membership. Details will come as the program is more fully developed.
**Product discounts:** The holy grail of RPGA management. We've wanted to offer discounts ever since the old TSR Mail Order Hobby Shop closed, and we're getting close to the goal. RPGA membership is already a great deal, but if and when we get this program up and running, only a fool won't join the Network.
**ESDs:** These electronic downloads of old publications are already available through the e-commerce store, but we'd like to offer them more cheaply to the members, and even give them away from time to time.
**Points redemption:** I referred to this above. Player and judge points are great, but they have little practical value at present. We plan to change that.
**Magazine discounts:** I've already mentioned this above.

In keeping with our goal to more fully integrate the RPG business, you can expect to see more RPGA "playability" in future WotC RPGs and magazines. We plan to make as many games playable for Network points as possible, and we've eliminated the four-hour-slot

rule (except as dictated by individual event coordinators) so that you can play your adventures until they're done and still receive points for them. Many of the adventures in *Dungeon Magazine* will be RPGA-friendly, and even R&D-designed adventures will be designed for RPGA play.

For example, there's a new kind of RPGA campaign that will launch next year. We're presently designing a super-adventure for the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, which will have RPGA scoring built right into it. Not only that, but we'll launch an annual campaign for it at next year's GEN CON, offering a "prequel" adventure at the convention, leading into the published adventure. Then, at various RPGA conventions throughout the year, we'll release scenarios that are designed to tie into the main adventure. The campaign will wind up at the following GEN CON, with an "epilogue" adventure. Meanwhile, we'll design a prequel for the next year's adventure, and the cycle will continue. In other words, this is a campaign that's designed to begin and end over the course of a single year, which will offer us opportunities to do some things that would be impossible in an ongoing campaign such as the LIVING CITY or LIVING GREYHAWK games.

There's one other major change to mention. We have recently come to an agreement to turn over management of the LIVING CITY campaign to an independent company, called Organized Play, Inc. Led by Ryan Dancey, who led the team that brought you the Third Edition D&D game, Organized Play will continue to run the campaign as if it were still a part of in-house WotC operations; however, Dancey and company will be able to add new services that WotC can't provide. For more information, visit www.organizedplay.com.

Of course, these remarks have been fairly general, and they probably evoke a lot of questions in your mind. The best way to get answers is to keep an eye on our Web site (www.rpga.com) and to keep reading *Polyhedron*. Operations are fairly stable once again, and we're ready to move forward to a new era for the RPGA. We hope that the past half year hasn't been too troublesome for you, and we look forward to much smoother sailing ahead. As long as the games continue, then I think we're most of the way there. Keep having fun, and keep making new friends out there—that's what the RPGA is all about!

DAVID WISE
WORLDWIDE RPGA DIRECTOR
wiseguy@wizards.com

*OrganizedPlay staffer Scott Magner and LC Information Director Rick Brill take in the gaming scene.*

## RPGA LICENSES LIVING CITY CAMPAIGN

This year at the GEN CON Game Fair RPGA Member's Meeting, David Wise announced that the LIVING CITY—RAVENS BLUFF campaign has been licensed to a new company headed by former Wizards of the Coast Vice-President Ryan Dancey. Ryan's new company is named OrganizedPlay.

Because there were only a few days between the time the license was finalized and GEN CON, neither David nor Ryan could discuss many of the details of the arrangement at the members meeting. Now that we've had time to catch our breath, we wanted to take this opportunity to talk about why the RPGA has licensed LIVING CITY, what OrganizedPlay is and what it intends to do with the campaign, and how these changes affect you and your LC characters.

Ryan was asked by Wizards of the Coast CEO Peter Adkison to become the business manager for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® in the fall of 1998. For the first few months of that assignment, he worked with a team of people that included David Wise on building a new strategy for the RPG business. It became obvious very early on that the RPGA Network needed to play a big part of those plans. In 2000, with Third Edition nearly finished, David left the business management group and became the worldwide director for the RPGA to fulfill that vision. With support from Ryan, the RPGA began to receive increased funding, and to focus on member recruitment and on improving RPGA services.

The result was an explosion in RPGA membership and RPGA LIVING™ campaign play. Everyone seemed to be responding well to the new sense of purpose and direction that the RPGA was providing. However, as David likes to say, it was the best of times, and the worst of times. First Hasbro purchased the company, and second, POKÉMON emerged as the most successful product in the history of the

company, causing a major strategic shift in Wizards of the Coast's priorities.

As many of you know, the first part of 2001 has been challenging for Wizards, and especially challenging for the RPGA. As the size of the POKÉMON business declines, the company has been working to reduce costs across the board. The RPGA has had its staff reduced and its funding cut. Due to unrelated issues, Ryan decided to leave Wizards and has been working on creating a whole new company focused on delivering infrastructure for the kinds of player support the RPGA, and game companies in general, need. After many lengthy months of negotiation, Wizards and Ryan's new company, OrganizedPlay, have agreed to terms for a license for the LIVING CITY—RAVENS BLUFF campaign. That deal will allow OrganizedPlay to take over responsibility for running the LIVING CITY, and will allow the RPGA to reallocate some resources to more general player support. The agreement between Wizards of the Coast and OrganizedPlay concerns only the LIVING CITY—RAVENS BLUFF campaign. The UK-based Sarbreenar and German Tsurlagol campaigns are not affected by it.

Ryan wants everyone playing LIVING CITY characters to know that for the present, everything about the campaign will remain the same. You'll continue to download scenarios from the RPGA Web site, and score the results using the current system. Your existing characters and certs remain legal and can be used in all LIVING CITY events.

We know that there are some continuing problems with the cert conversion process, and OrganizedPlay is determined to clean up the final remaining issues expeditiously. First, we've set up a special email address (certs@organizedplay.com) that you can contact regarding any cert issue. The OrganizedPlay staff reads mail sent to that address daily and will respond to any question or comment about certs directed to that address rapidly.

Second, OrganizedPlay is rapidly processing all the remaining cert conversion requests received to date. If you've sent in a package of certs for conversion, you should expect the updated certs in the mail in the next few weeks.

In addition, OrganizedPlay has prepared a special process for those people with outstanding cert issues that we think can clear the backlog of all remaining problems. From September 24th to the 28th, if you call the OrganizedPlay offices between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., PST, they will have staff standing by to answer your questions about certs and fix any remaining issues. The OrganizedPlay office phone number is (206)574-0234. During this time, you can continue to use the certs@organizedplay.com address for cert issues. You can also write to OrganizedPlay at 814 Industry Drive, Tukwila, WA 98188.

After September 28th, the cert conversion process will be complete, and OrganizedPlay will no longer be able to address new cert conversion issues. If you have a concern about your certs, have not received certs submitted for conversion, or have questions about the converted certs you did receive, you **must contact OrganizedPlay before September 28th**. No new cert issues will be fixed after that date.

Just a note about the cert conversion process: The time for submitting certs for conversion is past. OrganizedPlay is working now on certs received prior to the deadline for submitting certs for conversion. If you did not submit certs for conversion prior to the deadline, those certs are no longer valid and will not be converted.

Now some information about what the OrganizedPlay license means to LIVING CITY players.

We envision a four stage process of transition:

**Stage One** is the current situation, in which OrganizedPlay is managing the campaign, and Wizards of the Coast is managing the infrastructure for scenario downloading and results reporting.

**Stage Two** will begin this fall. In Stage Two, OrganizedPlay will create a LIVING CITY Web site and you will download scenarios directly from that site instead of the RPGA site. Billing for scenario download fees will be through OrganizedPlay.

**Stage Three** should be reached by the end of the year. In Stage Three, you will report the results of LIVING CITY play using online forms on the OrganizedPlay LIVING CITY Web site. That data will be transmitted to the RPGA regularly, to keep your RPGA member points data updated.

**Stage Four** will begin in the new year. In Stage Four, OrganizedPlay will begin to deliver online features for the campaign, such as digital characters and digital certs.

The long-term plan for LIVING CITY is to grow. The more players who actively play, and the more they play, the more

financial resources OrganizedPlay can devote to the campaign. To help that growth happen, OrganizedPlay is working with the LC Board of Directors to formulate a strategy for improving the scenarios you play, and making the ongoing storyline of the LIVING CITY something that you'll care passionately about, and be able to directly affect through LC scenario play.

In future months, we'll talk more about what it means to have a "digital character" or a "digital cert," and we'll talk about how we want to improve the scenarios and the way they're judged. We are very interested in your feedback. Until the LIVING CITY Web site "goes live," the OrganizedPlay staff will be active on the Wizards Community discussion boards (http://boards.wizards.com/cgi-bin/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=forum&f=248). Please let the Organized Play Staff know what you like and don't like about LIVING CITY, and ask them any questions you may have. They'll do their best to respond frequently, clearly, and quickly!

Both RPGA HQ and the folks at OrganizedPlay, Inc. extend heartfelt thanks to all the loyal members who have supported the LIVING CITY through the years, and to the dedicated volunteers who continue to make it function during this transition. We're all very glad to be working together on this project and have a hopeful and positive feeling about the future!

## NEWS FROM THE BRANCHES

The height of the convention season kept our European and UK correspondents from chiming in this issue, but the redoubtable Wes Nicholson did drop by with a special message from Down Under.

### ASIA-PACIFIC

More and more, LIVING GREYHAWK is getting people playing our games. Conventions in Brisbane, Perth, and Melbourne as well as game days all over the eastern seaboard, have seen people who previously disdained anything to do with RPGA clamouring for more and more LIVING GREYHAWK.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that Craig Walker and his capable helpers in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane are still going strong with a solid core of dedicated LIVING DEATH™ players.

As I write this, the news of the changes in the Network has filtered through to those members who are active on-liners, or have regular contact with their North American fellows. Reaction has been mixed but overall the positives seem to be in front. A number of members have been asking for years for a basic membership without *Polyhedron*—stemming from the days when *Poly* was LIVING CITY centric—and now they have what they wanted.

Brisbane gamers turned out in May for Maelstrom and for many of them their first taste of LD and/or LG. Chris Ryan dusted off an old *Star Wars* scenario for one last fling and the whole con was as laid back as most things are in Queensland. Sadly, the awards ceremony got messed up and some people didn't get their prizes on the day.

Melbourne turned on its (in)famous wet weather for *DWARFCon* again in early July. Nevertheless, about 100 players, plus wargamers, turned out for a weekend of mayhem. Richard Dennis resurrected his bunny ears, but no chocolates for the players this time. Maybe that's why the numbers were down on *Conquest*. For the open slots at this con there was always *RoboRally* and the GM for the weekend had some especially evil board setups. Kill counts were high.

The Hall of Heroes and Heroines ran their own con in Perth late July, no details as this is being written except for Doug Clutterbuck saying "everyone had a ball". That's a fine way to describe any convention, I think.

It was good to see the turnout at GEN CON too, although by the end of the weekend sleep deprivation was evident in a lot of folks. You should all have had a "roomie" like mine—I had the 8 am start on Sunday and he didn't , so he had a lie in for me. I'm told I felt much better for it, so thanks for that, Ian.

Looking ahead, the Company of the Griffon are running their first con in late September, in sunny Cairns. Early signs are that this will be another success for the GREYHAWK campaign, as well as the many other events the club plans to run.

WES NICHOLSON
ASIA-PACIFIC BRANCH MANAGER
Wes@netspeed.com.au

# Post Mortem: 147

## MORE ON DRACONIANS

Hey! Your magazine is really beginning to grow on me. Great job!

In issue #147, a letter caught my eye requesting Third Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® statistics for the draconians of the DRAGONLANCE® campaign setting. I was nterested to learn of the DRAGONLANCE adventure, *Anvil of Time*, and its associated goodies in *Dungeon* #86 in your response. I wanted to let you and your readers know, however, that the "definitive Third Edition" versions of the various draconian subraces (aurak, baaz, bozak, kapak, and sivak) do indeed exist, just in an unlikely source. Look for them in the back of the novel *Draconian Measures—Kang's Regiment*, by Don Perrin with Margaret Weis.

Fans may also be interested in checking out Krynn's official Third Edition Web site, the *Dragonlance Nexus*, at www.dl3e.com. There's not much there now, but efforts are underway to create a new online book, *Dragonlance Adventures Third Edition*, incorporating submissions from fans and supervised by DRAGONLANCE legends such as Tracy Hickman. Enjoy!

**Trevor Salla**
**Media, Pennsylvania**
**USA**

It breaks my heart to pieces to contradict the esteemed editor of such a stellar periodical, but in this I must so do. You speak in your lettercol that "no one has yet chimed in with the definitive Third Edition version of draconians," yet this is not entirely born of fact. The paperback version of the novel *Draconian Measures* contains the very definitive Third Edition version of draconians (by our own Steve Miller, Esq.), and I encourage all your readers to hie themselves posthaste to their booksellers for all their draconianological needs.

Yours in great respect,

**Mike Selinker**
**RPG R&D, Wizards of the Coast**

*Trevor and Mike weren't the only ones to chime in on our draconian gaffe last issue. Let it be known that we occasionally print an error or two within these hallowed pages (just don't spread it around too far, okay?). Thanks for setting us straight, folks. For all of you seeking stats for weird dragonmen who do strange things like turn to stone or blow up when they die, look no further than your local bookstore!*

## BACK TO THE DARK AGES?

I'm sorry to have to admit that I am very disappointed with the *Polyhedron* that arrived the other day (issue #147). Production wise, it was excellent, and I can't fault that. You and your team are doing some superb work on that front.

The content, however, is another thing.

A little over twelve months ago, the Australian RPGA switched from the US *Poly* to the UK *Poly* because many of us felt that the D&D-centric US version was irrelevant. The UK version turned out to be a completely different animal, with far less D&D material and more interesting stuff.

When the UK *Poly* was discontinued after issue #8, it was my understanding that the content of the new worldwide *Poly* was going to be a mixture of the old US style one, with the more eclectic UK one, with the production quality of the UK version.

While I can say that the production quality of the new worldwide *Poly* exceeds (by a LARGE margin) the quality of even the UK poly, the content is still pretty much the same as the old US version, especially in the case of issue #147. From the read I had through it the other night, the only non-D&D stuff I could find was a mention of *Shadowrun* in one of the sidebars in the Ogham article.

I appreciate that the vast majority of US members will only look at D&D-based articles. However, from the old issues of the UK *Poly* I received, it would seem that there are plenty of people in Europe who like articles on stuff other than D&D, as do many of the people I know here in Australia.

So, is the problem just a lack of articles?

I'd like to see the content

improving the way it was when the first few issues of the worldwide *Poly* came out. But given #147, I'm afraid that it's slipping back into the dark ages.

**Geoff Skellams**
**Ferny Grove, Queensland**
**Australia**

*It's touchingly ironic that the issue in which Geoff's letter asking for more non-D&D content is printed is the same magazine that features an 11-page* All Flesh Must be Eaten *article. . . by Geoff himself! Still, he's got a point. The last couple issues of* Polyhedron *have been pretty D&D heavy.*

*When we combined the venerable US* Poly *with the plucky UK version a few months back, it was our intention to cater to all of our various audiences. Though* DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *enjoys popularity all over the world, it's a fact that non-US members tend to be a little more adventurous in their gaming, sampling from lots of different systems rather than sticking with just one. On the other hand,* Polyhedron *has a long history of supporting the needs of D&D fans, including players of our various* LIVING™ *campaigns, most of which use the D&D rules engine.*

*Up until now, it's largely been an issue of article supply. When we got a good, printable article, we published it, no matter what the system. It just so happens that the number of would-be D&D writers absolutely dwarfs (get it?) the number of writers interested in smaller games, so it's possible for us to have absolutely no non-D&D content ready to go once it's time to put an issue together. The number of people who want material supporting other games in* Poly *pretty significantly outnumbers the number of people willing to actually write it. We can't print articles that haven't been written.*

*What does the future hold? With the shift of* Polyhedron *to the Official d20 Magazine (see* Network News *for the straight skinny), we'll be sticking pretty religiously to the game system that powers* DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. *That said, while swords and dragons will always have a place in these pages, we'll be taking our new responsibility seriously, pushing the d20 rules into genres and settings that ought to inspire even the most jaded dabbler in a dozen game systems.*

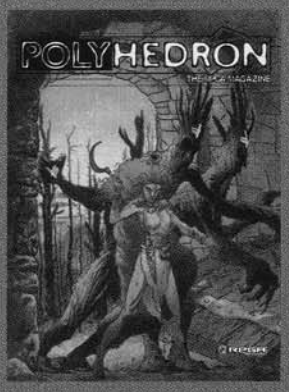
## RUNNING IN SHADOWS

WHOOO!!!! WHOOOO!!!!!!!

It's been a few days now, and I'm still as giddy as a munchkin with a *+5 vorpal sword* after receiving my first copy of *Polyhedron!* SWEET! I noticed that there is a LIVING™ Seattle campaign based in the *Shadowrun* world [*Virtual Seattle* –Ed.]. Is Wizards of the Coast planning on buying *Shadowrun* from FASA? I hope so, because *Shadowrun* is wicked, and if given a bit of work, it could be big $$$. (Or at least I think so. I love that world's nice combo of high tech and fantasy.)

**Darren Carlyle**
**Victoria, British Columbia**
**Canada**

*Thanks for the show of enthusiasm, Darren. While Wizards of the Coast didn't sweep in to save Shadowrun following FASA's recent collapse, another company, Wiz Kids, did. That company and a group of freelancers called Fantasy Productions publish the game now, and have some interesting things in store. Check out* www.shadowrun-rpg.com *for more details.*




The readers have spoken, and it's pretty clear that they like druids who play dirty. Of the articles in *Polyhedron* #147 (July, 2001), *Taking Revenge on Civilization* was a strong favorite, with many readers appreciating Lance Hawvermale's *Talking the Tree Tongue*, as well.

A lot of you told us that you enjoyed seeing statistics from some of your favorite LIVING CITY™ luminaries, as we presented in *Pillars of Ravens Bluff* (which concludes this issue). Do those of you who don't play LIVING CITY have any use for this type of article? Do you use the ready-made stat blocks for your games? Is it just useless filler to you? With the changes in the status of LIVING CITY (see *Network News*), we're taking another look at what place LC content has in the magazine, and would love to hear from you about it.

Please take a moment to fill out the Reader Response Survey at the back of this magazine. Two lucky responders last month received a shiny signed copy of the *Oriental Adventures* hardcover, and we've got more prizes this month!

# PILLARS OF RAVENS BLUFF

WRITTEN BY THE RPGA STAFF • ILLUSTRATED BY KALMAN ANDRASOFSZKY

More than 10,000 members of the RPGA® Network have participated in the LIVING CITY—RAVENS BLUFF™ campaign since it debuted more than ten years ago. Perhaps three times as many player characters have walked the streets of the City of Ravens, rescuing the city from demented elementalists, rampaging giants, demonic invasions, and worse. But player characters aren't the only heroes Ravens Bluff has to offer.

The recent tournament *Dragon's Rage and Rescue*, by Troy Daniels and Jason Nichols, illustrated this point nicely. The two-round scenario, which premiered at WINTER FANTASY™, featured a plot in which the player characters were captured by enemies at the end of the first round. When round two began, judges handed special characters to the players, such as they might receive in a "Classic" characters-provided scenario. Thus *Dragon's Rage* became a rescue mission in which the players assumed the personas of familiar NPCs in an attempt to free their own characters.

Who were the special characters? None other than the crème of Ravens Bluff's political crop, dignitaries who had, over the course of the campaign, been rescued from this or that predicament by player characters time and time again. Last issue, we featured four such characters: Lord Mayor Charles Oliver O'Kane, Bards Guildmaster Colin O'Lyre, Lady Lauren DeVillars, and Lady Penelope Norwood. This time we round out the group of rescuers with four more highly-placed members of Ravenian society.

## CHIEF PRELATE RELARN DAYSPRING

***Managing Ravens Bluff's contentious Clerical Circle can be trying for even the calmest of patriarchs. Relarn Dayspring will be lucky if it doesn't kill him. While still respected, even by his foes, as a vigilant enemy of evil, the deeply conflicted cleric of Lathander of late has fallen victim to several secret schemes that have deeply compromised his objectivity. Proud and confident in his ability to weather the storm, Dayspring represents a dangerous security risk for the City of Ravens.***

**Relarn Dayspring:** Male human Clr18; CR 18; Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 18d8+36; hp 131; Init +2; Spd 20 ft.; AC 26 (touch 12, flat-footed 24); Atk +21/+16/+11 melee (1d8+8, *+5 heavy mace*) or +15/+10/+5 ranged touch (by spell); AL LG; SV Fort +16, Ref +11, Will +21; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 17, Wis 23 (25), Cha 17.

*Skills and Feats:* Concentration +23, Diplomacy +24, Heal +18, Knowledge (the planes) +13, Knowledge (religion) +24, Scry +24, Spellcraft +24; Combat Casting, Empower Spell, Extend Spell, Extra Turning (x3), Maximize Spell, Spell Penetration.

*Spells per Day:* 6/8/8/8/7/7/6/5/4/3. Base DC = 19 + spell level. Deity: Lathander. Domains: Good (you cast good spells at +1 caster level), Sun (greater turning 1/day; turned creatures are destroyed instead).

*Possessions: Amulet of natural armor +4, +5 chain mail, cloak of resistance +3, figurine of wondrous power (serpentine owl), +5 heavy mace, pearl of power (1st-level spell), periapt of wisdom +2.*

### APPEARANCE

Relarn Dayspring has had a hell of a year. He does little to mask the pain and exhaustion that mars his face like the ink of an emotional tattoo, and the formerly-proud man now slouches in his stance, often forgetting to comb his thinning brown hair or to wear a clean set of clothes. Whereas Dayspring once preferred to wear simple temple robes at all occasions, he now dons his chain mail armor minutes after waking up in the morning, and sometimes even forgets to take it off before retiring for the evening. His powerful mace remains at his side at all hours of the day.

### PERSONALITY

Most citizens of Ravens Bluff know Relarn Dayspring as a kind, caring patriarch—a pensive, careful man who weighs issues from all perspectives before announcing his opinion or rulings on matters of import. A good judge of character, Dayspring prefers to quietly observe a situation before speaking or acting, taking the measure of everyone involved and approaching political matters from a strong strategic position. Despite his ostentatious title, Dayspring avoids overly ornate ceremony. His unwillingness to get into grandstanding rhetorical battles with other members of the Circle leads some to view him as provincial, but even his political enemies respect him. He appreciates fine food and ranks among Ravens Bluff's most devoted admirers of good music.

The events of the past two years, which have seen him stricken mysteriously ill, his children kidnapped, and his temple brought to shambles, have weighed heavily upon him. Often distracted, a very real strain of paranoia has worked its way into his thoughts, and careful deliberation that once stemmed from a desire to look at issues from several perspectives has become something of a mad hunt for the latest plot against

him. He strongly believes that only he can lead the Circle in this trying time, and remains convinced that several members of the order wish to oust him, which he views as a great victory for evil which he simply cannot allow to happen.

## Position and Duties

As chief prelate of the Clerical Circle, Relarn Dayspring is responsible for ensuring that the needs of the city's Civic Religion (made up of temples to Chauntea, Gond, Helm, Lathander, Mystra, Selûne, Tempus, Tymora, Tyr, and Waukeen) hold influence over the government of Ravens Bluff. To this end, he has the ear of Lord Mayor O'Kane, and often meets with representatives of the Council of Lords and Merchants Council. More often than not, his position sees him as the moderator of heated discussions between members of the Circle (zealous disciples of ten different gods seldom agree unanimously), a task he enjoys.

## History

Born fifty-two years ago to common parents in the City of Ravens, the young Relarn Dayspring dreamed of becoming an adventurer. As a boy he played with wooden swords and shields, hoping to enter the city's army and hence a world of thrills and challenges. On his seventeenth birthday, however, Relarn was struck and nearly killed by a runaway chariot. During his convalescence he faded in and out of consciousness frequently. During one such spell he experienced a deeply mystical vision that led him to the Lathanderian faith, and upon his full recovery he enrolled in the church as a junior cleric.

But the adventuring bug still burned strong within him. In 1341 DR, Lady Lauren DeVillars called the Champion's Games, proclaiming that the winner would become Lord Mayor of Ravens Bluff. Though he had no interest in running the city (and no honest expectation that he could win the tournament), Relarn entered the contest, hoping to make contacts with other adventure-minded individuals. His defeat in the first round failed to dent his enthusiasm, as the very man who had knocked him out of the competition made him just the offer he'd been looking for. That man, a warrior-priest of Tempus known as Blue Sannath, had been impressed by the young Dayspring's vigor, and offered him a place in his adventuring band, the Argent Brotherhood.

For seven years, Relarn Dayspring served as a spiritual guide (and, frequently, a much-needed healer) for the Brotherhood, which traveled throughout the Vast fighting agents of Mulmaster, the Cult of the Dragon, and the Zhentarim. The band's dislike for Zhents grew into a vendetta, which led to terrible consequences. In 1348, after infiltrating a secret Zhentarim stronghold in the mountains east of the village of Blanaer, the party fell victim to a horrible trap. In the ensuing debacle, all but Dayspring and Sannath were killed. Both suffered unspeakable tortures. Sannath had the skin peeled from his face, and Dayspring's left hand was sawn off at the wrist. In a final act of arrogance, the Zhents released the pair as a warning to other adventurers in the region.

Relarn returned to Ravens Bluff in disgrace, seeking solace at the Halls of the Morning Light, Lathander's splendid cathedral. He never saw Blue Sannath again. He felt in part responsible for getting the Brotherhood captured, and never again could he face his former leader. The Lathanderian clerics healed his wounded hand, but the emotional scars of the event plague him to this day.

In 1360 DR, Dayspring made the acquaintance of Alara Restivan, a hero from the Threskan campaign against Yamun Khahan's Tuigan Horde, which had invaded Faerûn earlier in the year. The two hit it off, and within two months they were married. Having put the failures of the past behind him as best as he was able, Dayspring concentrated on his religious and marital life. In 1362 he was named High Morninglord of the temple of Lathander and his wife gave birth to a son, Balament. Two years later, Alara produced female twins, Zelana and Estrid Dayspring.

But trouble lurked near. In 1370 DR, Chief Prelate Sirrus Melandor of Tyr was slain by demons in the streets of Ravens Bluff, a precursor to the war that would beset the city later that year. Relarn was named to the position by unanimous agreement of the high priests on the Clerical Circle.

During the war against the forces of the Warlord Myrkyssa Jelan, Relarn Dayspring's life became even more complicated. Alara, who had enlisted in the army as soon as Jelan proved herself a capable adversary, disappeared in early fighting and was assumed dead, since divinations revealed nothing of her fate. Perhaps due to grief (or, as many suggest, due to magical tampering), Dayspring fell into a deep illness from which he did not emerge for six months. His lethargy infected the Clerical Circle emotionally if not physically, and the body missed many key opportunities to aid the city during the war.

Shortly following Jelan's eventual defeat, mysterious assailants kidnapped Dayspring's three children. Many on the Circle suspected that the whole affair had been orchestrated by Cerephane, a strange, beguiling merchant who hoped to enroll her temple to Sharess to the Civic Religion and hence gain a seat on the Clerical Circle. Many suspected Cerephane of being a masked devil, her temple a sham and cover for a much darker religion dedicated to diabolism. Adventurers in service to Cerephane "miraculously" rescued Dayspring's children a few weeks after their capture. This, coupled with the fact that the Chief Prelate had not spoken out publicly against the so-called "House of Desires," confirmed many suspicions. Though Dayspring himself denied any connection he has lost some credibility among his more cynical peers.

But Dayspring's tragic year was just getting started. Within two weeks of the return of his children, Relarn's beloved brother Harold Dayspring, co-owner of the venerable *Ravens Bluff Trumpeter* broadsheet, was killed by a runaway chariot in an accident with several eerie similarities to that of Relarn's youth. Inexplicably, the most powerful *resurrection* magics failed to restore Harold to life, and Relarn entered a deeper stage of mourning.

Things got considerably worse when the elemental cabal known as the Circle of Four utterly destroyed the Halls of the Morning Light, crushing dozens of priests under rubble. For more than a week, Dayspring dithered, not sure what action to take in the face of such wanton destruction. Finally, a Sembian architect named Raphieonas offered to design and build a new temple for Ravens Bluff's Lathanderites. Work on the temple, called the Halls of the Glorious Dawn, began last year and is expected to be finished some time in 1373 DR.

Though Relarn Dayspring has yet to succumb to depression, careful observers of city politics now know that he can be influenced through his children. He has taken some effort to protect them—hiring guards to watch them while he is in council and the like—but his unwillingness to speak out against Cerephane was a major blow to the Clerical Circle, and more than a few members of Ravenaar clergies whisper that it may be time to elect a new chief prelate.

## LORD MAGISTRATE TORDON SUREBLADE

***The wealth flowing through Ravenian markets ensures no shortage of crooks and cutthroats. When captured, such louts invariably come before the stony-faced Tordon Sureblade, Lord Magistrate of Ravens Bluff. Known by criminals from all corners of the Vast as a staunch supporter of law and an unflinchingly honest operator, the Tormtar paladin brings a much-needed sense of credibility to the legal system of Ravens Bluff.***

**Tordon Sureblade:** Male human Pal17; CR 17; Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 17d10+34; hp 135; Init +2; Spd 20 ft.; AC 29 (touch 13, flat-footed 28); Atk +23/+18/+13/+8 melee (1d8+5/19-20 +2d6 holy damage to evil creatures, *+3 holy longsword*) or +18/+13/+8/+3 ranged touch (by spell); SA Smite evil, turn undead 7/day; SQ Aura of courage, *detect evil*, divine grace, divine health, empathic link with mount, griffon mount, *lay on hands*, *remove disease* 5/week, share spells with mount. AL LG; SV Fort +20, Ref +14, Will +17; Str 15, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 18, Cha 18.

*Skills and Feats:* Concentration +12, Diplomacy +19, Handle Animal +19, Knowledge (local) +10, Knowledge (religion) +12, Profession (judge) +19, Ride +16; Luck of Heroes, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge, Trample, Weapon Focus (longsword).

*Special Attacks:* Smite Evil (Su): 1/day add +4 to attack roll and +17 to damage against an evil creature. Turn Undead (Su): As 15$^{th}$-level cleric.

*Special Qualities:* Aura of Courage (Su): Immune to fear, allied within 10 ft. gain a +4 morale bonus on saving throws against fear effects. *Detect Evil* (Sp): At will. Divine Grace: Saving throws include Charisma modifier. Divine Health: Immune to all diseases. Empathic Link (Su): Can communicate telepathically with mount up to one mile distant. Griffon Mount. *Lay on Hands* (Sp): Heal up to 68 points of damage per day, or deal up to 68 points of damage per day to undead as if using a touch spell. Share Spells: Any spell cast by paladin also affects mount if within 5 ft.

*Spells per Day:* 3/3/3/2. Base DC = 14 + spell level.

*Possessions: Cloak of resistance +3, +3 full plate, +3 holy longsword, +3 large steel shield, ring of protection +2, phylactery of faithfulness, winged boots.*

**Zerasha:** Female griffon special mount; CR 5; Large beast; HD 13d10+39; hp 110; Init +2; Spd 30 ft., fly 80 ft. (average); AC 22 (touch 11, flat-footed 20); Atk +14 melee (2d6+5, bite), +7/+7 melee (1d4+5, claws); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 10 ft./5 ft.; SA Pounce, rake; SQ Daylight Spot bonus, scent; AL N; SV Fort +13, Ref +10, Will +6; Str 21, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 13, Cha 8.

*Skills:* Jump +12, Listen +8, Spot +21.

*Special Attacks:* Pounce (Ex): If a griffon dives or leaps upon a foe in the first round of combat, it can make a full attack even if it has already taken a move action. Rake (Ex): A griffon that pounces on an opponent can make two rake attacks (+8 melee) with its hind legs for 1d6+5 slashing damage each.

*Special Qualities: Command* (Sp): Can *command* griffons with fewer hit dice than itself 8/day. Daylight Spot Bonus (Ex): Griffons receive a +4 circumstance bonus to Spot checks made in the daylight. Empathic Link (Su): Can communicate telepathically with master to a distance of one mile. Improved Evasion (Ex): Reflex saves for half damage are at half or none. Scent (Ex): Can detect opponents within 30 ft. by sense of smell. Can follow tracks with Wisdom checks.

## Appearance

The severe Tordon Sureblade spends most of his days in the black and brown robes of his office at the courts. When on the town, he often dons his impressive plate mail armor, in part because he wishes to be ready for anything but also because he believes it makes him look handsome. He's always been conscious of his appearance, but now that he's approaching his fifty-eighth birthday he's beginning to despair that he will never find a wife. While he remains deeply committed to his position, he has of late attended several society functions in Uptown, even pretending to enjoy the festive party atmospheres and the "absurd" costumes often required of attendees. When not at court, Sureblade delights in riding his special mount, the griffon Zerasha, high over the City of Ravens.

## Personality

Criminals curse Tordon Sureblade for his tireless dedication to justice, commenting sadly about his knack for remembering the faces of those who have appeared in his court in the past. They bemoan his alertness, his knowledge of the law, and his unswerving focus.

More objective observers praise his patience, his fearlessness in battle, and his ability to make fast, skillful judgements both in the courtroom and on the field of battle. They note his charitable donations, both to the church of Torm and to the families of criminals he has sent to prison or the gallows.

Tordon has a very dry, very funny sense of humor, though only his closest friends or companions ever get a chance to appreciate it as he prefers to keep that side of himself private. Though deeply religious and dedicated to Torm the True, Sureblade respects all goodly religions, and has been known to go light on sentences of genuinely repentant religious criminals. He feels awkward in most social situations, and hates aimless small talk. A bona-fide chess master, Tordon tends to view his court appearances as chess matches, with insignificant-seeming "moves" coming into play later, trapping his adversary in a legal checkmate.

## Position and Duties

As lord magistrate, Sureblade must manage the operations of the lower courts and judges, preside as judge over the city's highest court, and supervise the codification of the city's laws. Because the city attracts and produces so many criminals, Tordon is forced to do a lot of paperwork himself, which regretfully keeps him away from the adventuring life.

His position carries with it a seat on the Council of Lords, a duty the lord magistrate is loath to endure, as he has little tolerance for the pretensions and buffoonery of the nobility. In fact, some of the less scrupulous lords of the city view Tordon Sureblade as a hostile, meddling nuisance. They see him as a commoner who has risen too far above his station to be useful and who, just maybe, ought to be taken care of on a permanent basis by whatever means are most expedient and least traceable.

## History

Tordon Sureblade came to Ravens Bluff when he was only five years old, having fled with his father and half-brother from their home village of Dead Tree Hollow, which had been ravaged by a wandering band of minotaurs. Tordon noticed the rampant corruption of Ravens Bluff at a very early age, but instead of succumbing to it and joining a street gang as many of his playmates did, he decided to influence Ravens Bluff from within by joining the city government. He knew that doing so would require an education, however, so while his friends played in the streets he studied in musty libraries, teaching himself how to read by poring over tomes of history, politics, and religion.

At some point during his studies he came upon the teachings of Torm, and soon fell in with a band of Tormtar priests and philosophers. To his surprise and delight, Tordon discovered a great power surging within him—recognition from Torm himself that he was to act as a favored servant of the Loyal Fury. He became a paladin, and with his newfound friends he ventured across the Dragon Reach, adventuring for a few years in distant Sembia. Eventually, however, he longed to return to the city that had become his childhood home. The strength of will he received from Torm spoke to his heart, telling him that he could make an important difference in the City of Ravens.

Upon his return, he enrolled as a barrister and began arguing cases before the Lord Magistrate. In this duty he stared the city's corruption straight in the eyes, always tempering his frustration with the belief that eventually, he would be able to make a difference. At times it seemed as though no one appreciated his efforts, but eventually they attracted the attention of Lady Lauren DeVillars, who had a mind to clean up the city. She and Tordon became fast friends, and the young paladin contributed many suggestions to the plan that eventually brought about the Champion's Games and restored a semblance of order to the city.

In 1348 DR, the old Lord Magistrate stepped down, and the jockeying for his position grew fierce, with several openly corrupt lords vying for the appointment or forwarding puppets for consideration. Tordon had distinguished himself earlier in the year by prosecuting a high-profile murder trial against the mad diviner Grim Zemladiken, who had harvested the livers and small intestines of Crow's End beggars for much of the previous year in preparation for a fanciful imaginary ceremony known as the Organic Convergence. The recognition following Zemladiken's conviction brought Sureblade's name to the top of the contender list, and in early 1349 DR he became Ravens Bluff's lord magistrate.

In the more than twenty years since his appointment, Sureblade has dedicated himself to revamping the city's criminal code, ensuring that it is clear, flexible, and fair. Most of all, he has done everything within his power to ensure that the law looks upon all citizens equally, ensuring that evil or corrupt nobles can't simply hide behind their titles to dodge justice. Of course, he hasn't been completely successful—old influence remains strong, even in the City of Ravens

# SHEENRA DUTH

***The Harpers have agents throughout Faerûn. With its confluence of magical catastrophes and propensity to attract powerful outsiders and evil spellcasters, it should come as little surprise that Ravens Bluff sports a handful of Harper Friends and minor agents. Following the war against Myrkyssa Jelan, however, Those who Harp have taken a more profound interest in the city by dispatching the scout Sheenra Duth. The reports sent back to her masters may have important ramifications in the months to come...***

**Sheenra Duth:** Female human Rog14/Harper Scout 2; CR 16; Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 14d6+28+2d6+4; hp 88; Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 25 (touch 19, flat-footed 18); Atk +17/+12/+7 melee (1d6+6/16-20/x2, *+4 rapier*) or +22/+17/+12 ranged (1d6+4/x3, *+2 short bow*); SA Sneak attack +7d6, favored enemy (Cult of the Dragon); SQ Denier's eye, Harper knowledge, improved evasion, skill focus, slippery mind, uncanny dodge; AL CG; SV Fort +6, Ref +19, Will +10; Str 14, Dex 24, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 13, Cha 16.

*Skills and Feats:* Balance +21, Bluff + 7, Decipher Script +11, Diplomacy +24, Disable Device +8, Disguise +20, Gather Information +16, Hide +17, Innuendo +8, Intimidate +5, Jump +4, Knowledge (local) +7, Listen +18, Move Silently +20, Open Lock +15, Perform +10, Pick Pocket +11, Search +20, Sense Motive +18, Spot +18, Tumble +24, Use Magic Device +9, Wilderness Lore +3; Alertness, Blind-fight, Expertise, Improved Critical (rapier), Improved Disarm, Iron Will, Weapon Finesse (rapier).

*Harper scout spells known*(2; base DC = 13 + spell level): 1st—*charm person, comprehend languages, message, spider climb.*

*Possessions: +5 leather armor, +4 rapier, +2 short bow, +2 arrows (18), ring of protection +2, hat of disguise.*

## Appearance

Sheenra passes for 28 years old, though in truth she's lived a decade longer. Her youthful presence comes from good looks and a tendency to view everything through an oppressively optimistic filter. She's good looking, in a bubbly, bouncy sense, and her infectious smile and laughter makes her the center of attention nearly everywhere she goes. When on a mission,

she tends to use her *hat of disguise* to assume an appearance appropriate to the task at hand.

## Personality

Sheenra's exuberant passion for life shines through in her bright blue eyes. She seems to love simply being alive, whether dancing under cover at a noble's ball or crawling through pig manure to stake out a better spot from which to eavesdrop. Her presence attracts others and her energetic demeanor tends to rub off on her companions, enhancing their moods simply by hanging around.

Even when engaged in a conversation or walking through a crowded room, Duth's eyes always carefully take in the scene. She has an eidetic memory, and can easily recall things she's simply glimpsed, making her an invaluable Harper agent. A thief in the truest sense of the word, Sheenra incorporates theft into nearly all of her missions simply because it gives her a great thrill to take something that isn't hers. She seemingly lives life by this metric, engaging in those activities she finds thrilling and ignoring just about everything else. She has suffered great losses of family and friends in the past, which has convinced her to take dangerous chances whenever possible. After all, she reasons, having had everything she cared about taken from her already, what more can she possibly lose?

## Position and Duties

Sheenra is a wandering agent of Those who Harp, observing the affairs of the City of Ravens and reporting back to her superiors through intermediaries. Though she has contact with many Harper Friends in the city, hers is not a recruitment mission. She sometimes forwards the names of those who have helped her to her superiors, but she is not authorized to initiate someone into the organization.

Originally sent to keep an eye on Ravens Bluff with the plan to write up a general summary for higher-placed Harpers, Sheenra was surprised to uncover a plot by an evil organization known as the Consortium of the Bloody Fang shortly after arriving in the city. She has since been tasked with remaining in the city and acting against the Bloody Fang whenever possible while remaining alert to additional threats.

## History

Sheenra Duth was born in Athkatla, in Amn, to a merchant family deeply enmeshed in dangerous political feuding. These intrigues led to her mother being kidnapped and decapitated by a rival merchant, who later slew her father by stabbing him in public with a poisoned knife. She gained her revenge upon the hated merchant, burning his house and shop after robbing both blind. With her newly gained loot, Duth bankrolled a hasty retreat from Amn, traveling southwestern Faerûn for a handful of years.

On one such trip, she encountered a wandering minstrel and immediately took to the man. After following him from city to city pestering him to reveal his tales and professing a love for the life of a traveling musician, the bewildered Harper dropped her off at Twilight Hall, in Berdusk, where she began her Harper training.

Sheenra rapidly exasperated her trainers by volunteering for every single mission available, often excitedly chatting about her plans only moments after she had thought of them. Her superiors quietly assigned her to minor courier duties, expecting her to either fail or get tripped up by her shiny disposition. In fact, neither happened. Instead, Sheenra found a way to expand apparently insignificant duties into important fact-finding missions. After one such show of ingenuity revealed the movements of several dozen Zhents over the course of an entire year, her superiors happily promoted her to full Harper Scout status.

Upon arriving in Ravens Bluff, Sheenra discovered disturbing evidence that the Consortium of the Bloody Fang, an offshoot of the Cult of the Dragon, was active in the city, and had plans upon many Ravenaar noble houses (including House DeVillars). While the Harpers officially have a non-intervention policy regarding the

affairs of the city of Ravens Bluff, they're more than willing to make an exception when dealing with enemies such as the Bloody Fang, who have hunted Harpers for more than a century.

Sheenra is fairly open about her Harper status, in part because she hopes it will draw out agents of the Bloody Fang. She can usually be found hanging around the Wyvern's Nest, a Zakharan temple off one of the city's many marketplaces.

# CHANEY, CHIEF SPY

***Ravens Bluff has countless enemies. As such, it sometimes becomes necessary to employ secret agents of questionable character who can operate from the shadows, slipping from one persona to another after taking care of the government's dirty work. Chaney, Ravens Bluff's Chief Spy, serves ably in this capacity, combining a deeply nurtured opportunism with calculating pragmatism and the ability to take any form he wishes. A doppelganger brought to the city by a former dignitary, Chaney enjoys his position and will do anything (within or without reason) to protect it.***

**Chaney:** Male doppelganger Rog16; CR 19; Medium-size shapechanger; HD 4d8+4 + 16d6+16; hp 94; Init +8; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (touch 14, flat-footed 14); Atk +24/+19/+14/+9 melee (1d4+6/17-20/x2, *+5 dagger of venom*); SA Detect thoughts, sneak attack +8d6, crippling strike; SQ Alter self, immunities, uncanny dodge, improved evasion, slippery mind; AL NE; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +6; Str 12, Dex 18, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 13.

*Skills and Feats:* Bluff +20, Climb +11, Decipher Script +11, Diplomacy +19, Disguise +22, Escape Artist +9, Forgery +6, Gather Information +20, Hide +23, Intimidate +22, Jump +3, Listen +11, Pick Pockets +6, Read Lips +6, Search +11, Sense Motive +6, Spot +10, Tumble +9, Use Rope +9; Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Expertise, Improved Critical (dagger), Improved Initiative.

*Special Attacks:* Detect thoughts: Chaney can continuously detect thoughts as the spell cast by an 18th-level sorcerer (save DC 13). He can suppress or resume this ability as a free action.

*Special Qualities:* Alter self: Chaney can assume the shape of any Small or Medium-size humanoid as alter self cast by an 18th-level sorcerer (though he can remain in this shape indefinitely). Changing forms is a standard action. Immunities: Immune to sleep and charm effects. Skills: Chaney receives a +4 racial bonus to Bluff and Disguise checks. When using his alter self ability, Chaney receives an additional +10 circumstance bonus to Disguise checks. If he can read an opponent's mind, Chaney gets a further +4 circumstance bonus to Bluff and Disguise checks.

*Possessions: +5 leather armor, +5 dagger of venom (2), amulet of proof against detection and location.*

## Appearance

As a doppelganger, Chaney can assume countless guises. He does, however, have three preferred forms, each of which has a separate identity and personality. "Chaney" himself is one such identity, a mask worn by an inhuman predator. Years living among humans may have tamed the beast behind the disguises, but deep within, it keeps its own council, and never reveals its true appearance.

**Chaney:** The doppelganger prefers this of all its human forms, and assumes it whenever it is not actively pretending to be something else. It has come to associate this form with "rest," which it greatly appreciates. Like a favorite shirt, the Chaney guise suits the creature well, and it finds comfort in wearing it.

The form is that of a short human male, about 5 ft. 5 in. tall. He wears his greasy long hair pulled back into a slick ponytail. He wears black leather armor and openly bears his twin *daggers of venom* on his belt. There's an aura of menace about him, in part due to his beady eyes and harelip. The doppelganger stole the form from a wererat it murdered in the sewers of Ravens Bluff shortly after its arrival, and it amuses itself by playing up its rat-like tendencies in hopes that enemies will underestimate its true power.

**Foltor:** The doppelganger prefers to wear this guise when working in business districts. Foltor appears as a hulking, stupid human laborer. Pretending to be slow-witted and likable, the doppelganger preys off of the arrogance of people who speak openly in front of others they deem too stupid to do them harm. Its *detect thoughts* ability, of course, also comes in helpful in this regard.

**Hoot:** When spying near the Harbor District or one of the city gates, the doppelganger prefers the form of Hoot, a legless human beggar of indiscriminate sex who ekes out a meager living as a storyteller. Hoot's unusual name comes from the spastic noises the doppelganger sometimes adds in the middle of one of the stories; it feels the outbursts gives its performance a certain authenticity appreciated by the type of smuggler scum it usually keeps tabs on when working near the harbor.

## Personality

Chaney doesn't care one bit about the welfare of Ravens Bluff. He does, however, greatly appreciate his generous salary and the fact that, occasionally, he gets to bloody his hands while on official city business. In the years since arriving in the city, he has grown to appreciate how much easier it is to live within human walls than it was to live outside them, in the harsh

wilderness. At this point, he would rather die than return to his old life.

Chaney has little interest in the restrictive laws of human society, but he knows that flagrant violations of them will probably get him killed. He's seen many examples of what the city's adventurer population does to "monsters" discovered in their midst, and he has no intention to stand at ground zero of a *blade barrier* or *flame strike* any time soon. He is, in fact, paranoid that some stupid paladin will accidentally discover his true nature and decide to deal out instant justice. For this reason, he refuses to work with individuals professing a strong religious belief.

His main motivation is to catch criminals or saboteurs in the action, report them to the authorities, and then watch from afar as their carefully laid plans crumble around them and they ask where they had possibly gone wrong. The fact that his reports occasionally result in someone's death (either on the gallows or in a dark alley) gives him considerable glee. On more than one occasion he has condemned innocents with damning reports simply so he can steal and consume their bodies after they have been executed.

## Position and Duties

Chaney works alone, independent of the city's other intelligence services (though he occasionally works with agents of other organizations at the request of the government). Technically, the only people who can give him orders are Lord Mayor Charles O'Kane and the sitting Deputy Mayor (who nominally commands all of the city's intelligence officers). He reports directly to the mayor, who forwards his reports to the proper authorities after he has reviewed them. Charles O'Kane doesn't like Chaney, but he realizes the creature is a powerful tool for the city.

Chaney was brought to the city several years ago by the now-missing former Deputy Mayor Howard Holiday, who vanished just before the war. Mayor O'Kane believes that Chaney knows where his friend might have gone and why he hasn't been heard from since, but the doppelganger professes ignorance on the matter.

## History

The enigmatic Chaney reveals little about himself to anyone, preferring to keep his own company or the company of Dudo and Pudo, a pair of rats he discovered near his lair in the city sewers and befriended. Now that Howard Holiday is gone, Mayor Charles O'Kane is probably closest to the doppelganger, and that's not saying much.

The creature who would become Chaney once lived with a pack of his kin in a ruined keep in the Earthfast Mountains. In late 1349 DR, it had the misfortune of being captured by Howard Holiday, an adventurer from Ravens Bluff. Holiday claimed the monster as treasure, shackling it to his wagon and bringing it home with him (under cover, of course, as even then it was illegal to smuggle monsters into the city).

When Holiday eventually became Deputy Mayor in 1354, he presented a bold idea to his friend Charles O'Kane. With the still relatively young government threatening to collapse due to the machinations of power-hungry lords, both men knew that they needed a stabilizing force to keep an eye out for their own interests. Holiday suggested the perfect spy, the doppelganger he had captured five years earlier and had been training ever since. O'Kane agreed to the plan, and Chaney entered the secret service of the City of Ravens.

Since then, he has revealed countless plans against the city, and though he occasionally steps over the lines of propriety and decency to get his job done, he's adept at using his *alter self* ability to frame others. He hasn't been caught yet, and doesn't plan to get caught in the near future. He's careful, and his lust for blood is easily manageable.

Most of the time.

# Terrors of Gothic Earth

**MONSTERS FROM A GASLIT WORLD** **By Matt Sernett** **Illustrated by Adam Rex**

The history of our comfortable world is accented by colorful folklore. Who can say which of these myths is based on fact or fiction? In the world of Gothic Earth, home to the MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH® and LIVING DEATH™ campaigns, a legend's most terrible aspect often has its origin in truth. People often have created myths to impart a lesson; a core of truth lies hidden among the clouds of fancy. But in Gothic Earth, myths are just as often created to conceal the truth. Some truths are too horrible to confront unless couched within the context of a story. Here, then, are four such chilling stories, with complete d20 statistics to help you incorporate the ghastly monsters associated with them into your MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH campaigns.

## THE JERSEY DEVIL

*"There lived, in the year 1735, in the Township of Burlington, a woman. Her name was Leeds, and she was shrewdly suspected of a little amateur witchcraft. Be that as it may, it is well established, that, one stormy gusty night, when the wind was howling in turret and tree, Mother Leeds gave birth to a son, whose father could have been no other than the Prince of Darkness. No sooner did he see the light than he assumed the form of a fiend, with horse's head, wings of a bat, and a serpent's tail. The first thought of the newborn was to fall foul of his mother, whom he scratched and bepommelled soundly, and then flew through the window out into the village, where he played the mischief generally. Little children he devoured, maidens he abused, young men he mauled and battered; and it was many days before a holy man succeeded in repeating the enchantment of Prospero. At length, however, Leed's devil was laid—but only for 100 years."*

*— The Atlantic Monthly*, 1859

Some say it was because Mrs. Leeds was a witch. Some claim it was because she insulted a priest or gypsy. Many believe she was married to her brother. Some even say that she slept with the Devil. And others think it happened because God sought to punish her for her wanton ways. Still others suggest that the child wasn't a devil, just a deformed baby that brought shame to the house of Leeds. Some people would have you believe that it wasn't Mrs. Leeds at all, that is was a Mrs. Shrouds, who lived in Leeds Point. But some tell a story that comes closer to the truth...

*"It is a haunted place where the blood red waters of the Mullica River rise in the bog of a New Jersey town... The cedars that line the riverbanks stain the waters their deep color. Stunted pines stand motionless, their shallow roots anchored precariously in gleaming white stands. Silence reigns."*

*—Helena Mann-Malnitchenko, said of the New Jersey Pine Barrens in her autobiography, A Haunted Place*

The Pine Barrens is a two thousand square mile area of dark forests and quiet marshes in southeastern New Jersey. Originally inhabited only by the Lenni Lenape Indians, white settlers were willing to settle there only after Henry Hudson explored the region in 1609. Even then the land was largely ignored because the ground could not support much farming. When Mrs. Leeds and her husband settled there in the early 1700's the land was much the same as when Hudson first set foot in the shadowy woods.

The Leeds had a hard life there. Livestock seemed to fall ill too often and the land was infertile. The same could not be said of Mrs. Leeds. Indeed, she was blessed with many children, twelve in all, but with life so hard out in the Barrens, she didn't count it as much of a blessing. When she learned she had another child on the way, Mrs. Leeds fretted constantly about what they would do when they had another mouth to feed. Nine months later the local midwife was called to the Leeds house on a stormy autumn night. The birth was not easy, and exasperated by the ordeal and by the thought of another child Mrs. Leeds cried out, "May the Devil take this one!"

He did.

The child at first appeared to be a normal, beautiful baby boy. But then it changed before their eyes, growing a long snake-like tail and horns almost instantly. The body stretched and convulsed, becoming large and gangly, while the face contorted and grew into something horse-like and vile. Lastly, great wings sprouted from the creature's back and it stood before them on cloven hooves. The whole transformation took just a moment and while the Leeds were stunned into inaction, the horror they had given birth to slashed open the midwife's throat with its jaws and then flew up the chimney, its belly filled with the midwife's blood.

Some stories say that Mrs Leeds's devil-son returned on many nights until she finally shooed it off. Alas, the truth is more terrible than the fiction. The devil did return on the next night, and for eleven nights after that. And each night after its return, one of its brothers or sisters no longer drew breath in this world. The devil killed them in hideous ways, devouring the soft parts of their bodies and leaving the rest for its terrified parents to bury and mourn. The Leeds remained trapped in their house while their devil-son preyed upon their children, knowing it would not be sated until all the children were dead. Only then was the Jersey Devil satisfied. Only then had the Red Death fulfilled Mrs. Leeds's wish to have fewer children. The Leeds abandoned their home and fled the region, never to be heard from again, but not before they warned a few friends about their son.

The Leeds's son ran amok throughout the region, seeking its parents. It ruined crops, killed livestock, and even flew off with unwary children until one day in 1740 when a group of hunters, trappers, and adventurers hunted it down and tricked it into a pit. A priest among the party banished the creature using a powerful spell from a magical text on exorcisms and the creature was not seen for nearly a hundred years.

Early in the 19th century, the Jersey Devil was spotted by Commodore Stephen Decatur while he was testing cannonballs at the Hanover Iron Works. He fired at and hit the creature while it was in flight, but it kept flying as if the gaping hole he put through it did not harm it at all. Jospeh Bonaparte, former king of Spain and brother of the famed Napoleon, claimed to have seen the creature while hunting in 1839. And many more heard the shrill shrieks and saw the tracks of the creature a year later in Vincentown, when a large number of sheep and chickens were stolen and mutilated. More recently, in 1899, Philadelphia Newspapers reported the story of businessman George Saarosy, who was awoken one night by loud, high-pitched screams in his yard. When he looked out his window, he saw the Jersey Devil fly past his house.

## The Jersey Devil

**Large Outsider**
**Hit Dice:** 4d8+12 (30 hp)
**Initiative:** +0
**Speed:** 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (average)
**AC:** 13 (-1 size, +4 natural)
**Attacks:** Bite +8, 2 claws +3 melee
**Damage:** Bite 1d8+5, claw 1d6+2
**Face/Reach:** 5 ft. by 5 ft./10 ft
**Special Attacks:** Frightful presence, gaze
**Special Qualities:** Damage reduction 15/+1, regeneration 5, scent, skillful squeeze
**Saves:** Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +5
**Abilities:** Str 20, Dex 11, Con 17, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 12
**Skills:** Escape Artist +6, Hide +6, Listen +5, Move Silently +4, Spot +9
**Feats:** Flyby Attack, Power Attack

**Climate/Terrain:** Any forest or marsh
**Organization:** Solitary
**Challenge Rating:** 3
**Treasure:** None
**Alignment:** Always chaotic evil
**Advancement:** 5-8 HD (Large); 9-12 (Huge)

The Jersey Devil looks like a nightmarish amalgamation of creatures bound to the twisted soul of a demon. Crazed, phosphorescent eyes glare from the sockets of its gaunt, horned, and horse-like head, and foul black lips curl over savage yellow fangs. Its emaciated, man-like body and wretched posture belies the inhuman strength it uses to tear apart its victims. Its short arms end in long, filthy claws, and its thin, almost bird-like legs end in cloven hooves. A snake's tail curls and whips about it, and the tattered wings of a giant bat sprout from its back. Despite an impressive 10-foot height, the Jersey Devil has been known to squeeze its tortured form through spaces as small as one foot in diameter.

The Jersey Devil delights in terrorizing whatever creatures it meets, and it takes sadistic joy in mutilating the corpses of the creatures it has killed. It has survived in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey for more than a hundred years because it is wary of humans and attacks only lone travelers or small groups. From time to time it has made alliances with witches, evil adepts, and other creatures of dark spirit that come to hide in the shadows of the pines. Such alliances often result in increased sightings of the Devil as it goes about holding up its end of whatever dark bargain has been struck. The Jersey Devil is also a harbinger of war and other disasters. Sometimes the Devil is the cause of those disasters; at other times it just smells them on the wind.

Locals know the Jersey Devil is real. Who can doubt it when they hear its hoof beats on their rooftops and see its tracks in the snow? Few speak openly about the creature, fearing that doing so will bring the Jersey Devil's wrath. A local will often carry a bible when going into the woods alone or traveling by night, as doing so seems to keep the Jersey Devil at bay. In truth, the Devil simply recognizes the object as a book and associates it with the book the priest used to banish it so long ago.

## Combat

The Jersey Devil has little to fear from most people and it knows that most humans have no chance of killing it. It delights in terrorizing victims for hours with its call and gaze before swooping by and tearing out their throats.

**Frightful Presence (Ex):** The Jersey Devil can emit a bloodcurdling shriek that terrifies any within 60 feet who hear it. Creatures who hear the Jersey Devil's scream must make a Will save (DC 13) or be frightened (see page 84 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) for 5d6 rounds. Creatures that succeed the Will saving throw are immune to the Jersey Devil's frightful presence for 1 hour.

**Paralyzing Gaze (Su):** The Jersey Devil's terrible glowing eyes have the power to paralyze creatures with fear. Creatures within 50 feet of the Jersey Devil must make a Will save (DC 13) or be paralyzed for 5d6 rounds.

**Skillful Squeeze (Su):** The Jersey Devil is not limited by the size of his head when making Escape Artist checks. It may squeeze through an opening as small as one foot in diameter.

## The Wicker Man

*"The whole nation of the Gauls is greatly devoted to ritual observances, and for that reason those who are smitten with the more grievous maladies and who are engaged in the perils of battle either sacrifice human victims or vow so to do, employing*

*the druids as ministers for such sacrifices. They believe, in effect, that, unless for a man's life a man's life be paid, the majesty of the immortal gods may not be appeased; and in public, as in private life, they observe an ordinance of sacrifices of the same kind. Others use figures of immense size whose limbs, woven out of twigs, they fill with living men and set on fire, and the men perish in a sheet of flame. They believe that the execution of those who have been caught in the act of theft or robbery or some crime is more pleasing to the immortal gods; but when the supply of such fails, they resort to the execution even of the innocent."*

*—Julius Caesar, Gallic Wars, Book VI*

The poet Lucan wrote that there were three mighty gods of the Celtic pantheon that demanded human sacrifice: Taranis, the thunder god, Esus the lord and master, and Teutates, the overall god of the people. Each of these gods was offered sacrifice in a particular way. Teutates took sacrifices from the sacred wells. Esus was offered victims who were hanged from sacred trees, stabbed to death, or both. And the thunder god Taranis required that prisoners of war be burnt alive in giant wicker cages. Julius Caesar wrote of men being trapped in wicker effigies that were then put to the torch. Scholars argue about the veracity of such accounts, and skeptics point out that it was to Caesar's advantage to make the Gauls into monsters. In an age when science rules it is an easy argument to make, but it ignores an essential fact: It was also to Caesar's advantage to hide the truth of how monstrous his foes actually were.

*"Throughout Gaul there are two classes of persons of definite account and dignity. The common people are treated almost as slaves and are neither heard nor listened to in councils. Most of them, in debt or under heavy tribute or by the injuries of those more powerful commit themselves in service to the nobles, who have over them all the rights which masters hold over slaves. Of the two notable classes, one consists of druids and the other of knights. The first concern themselves with divine affairs, managing public and private sacrifices and interpreting matters of religion. A great number of young men gather about them to learn and hold them in great honor. In fact, it is they who decide in almost all disputes, public and private; and if any crime has been committed, or murder done, or there is any dispute about succession or boundaries, they also decide it, determining rewards and penalties.*

*—Julius Caesar, Gallic Wars, Book VI*

Druids commonly served as judges and priests, and did not normally engage in war. But when great battles occurred, druids could always be found nearby, presiding over rites that gave the Gauls berserk courage and casting curses upon their enemies. Behind battle lines they constructed great cages in the forms of men, and captives of the day's battle were kept within them. On the dawn of the next day, these cages were set aflame, so that the druids' enemies could hear the screams of the captured troops and smell their cooked flesh on the wind. When this was not enough to break the will of their foes, the druids could sometimes find the power to animate the towering infernos and send them wading in amongst the ranks of the enemy. The Romans suffered such attacks, but Caesar could not record such assaults as he only half-believed what his troops swore they witnessed, and if such accounts were to become widespread, he would loose support for his war.

Caesar eventually conquered the Gauls, but not without the help of Roman sorcerers. Although normally tolerant of conquered foes' religions, the Romans hunted the druids relentlessly. When Christianity came to the British Isles, the druids sufered another blow. Hunted as witches and warlocks, many druids suffered the ironic fate of being burned alive. Despite it all, the druids' faith has survived.

Time has changed the faith in most places. Children make dolls out of wheat and dance about maypoles with no idea of the significance of such actions. But on isolated islands and in backwater villages there exist a few individuals who remember the old words, and some of them even remember some of the old magic. Outsiders would do well to be wary in such places, for among those communities that follow the old ways, the druid retains his role as judge, and if an innocent must die, better that it not be one of their own.

## Wicker Man

**Huge Construct**
**Hit Dice:** 12d10 (66 hp)
**Initiative:** -1 (Dex)
**Speed:** 30 ft. (can't run)
**AC:** 15 (-2 size, -1 Dex, +8 natural)
**Attacks:** 2 slams +16 melee
**Damage:** Slam 2d8+9
**Face/Reach:** 10 ft. by 5 ft./15 ft.
**Special Attacks:** Encage, improved grab
**Special Qualities:** Construct traits, damage reduction 15/+1, fire immunity, flammable body, magic immunity, piercing immunity
**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +4
**Abilities:** Str 28, Dex 9, Con—, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 1

**Climate/Terrain:** Any land
**Organization:** Solitary or gang (2-4)
**Challenge Rating:** 7
**Treasure:** None
**Alignment:** Always neutral
**Advancement:** 13-19 HD (Huge); 20-36 HD (Gargantuan)

A wicker man is a huge, hollow structure of branches and vines crudely woven into the form of a man. A tall crown of twigs juts up from its featureless head, and its arms end in massive bundles of sharp branches which it uses to snatch up creatures and to toss them through the cage-door in its chest.

Wicker men are usually created for festivals in communities that observe the old ways of the druids. During these festivals, criminals and other undesirables are locked within the wicker man and it is set aflame. If there is no such person available, the people of the village sometimes seek to entice an outsider to the site of the rite for sacrifice. On those rare occasions when a sacrificial victim escapes, a druid sometimes can find the power to animate the wicker man after a suitable sacrifice of innocents. The druid then sends out the wicker man to retrieve the escapee.

## Combat

Wicker men follow the commands of their creators, killing or capturing as instructed. The wicker man's creator can command it if it is within 60 feet and the creator can be seen and heard by it. When not being given an order, the wicker man generally follows the last order it received to the best of its ability, though if attacked it returns the attack. The creator can give the wicker man a simple program to follow in his absence, such as "Capture four people and return," or, "remain here and attack all who come near."

**Encage (Ex):** A wicker man can attempt to encage foes of Large or smaller size by making a successful grapple check. Victims of this attack are tossed within the wicker man's chest cavity. The wicker man causes no damage to foes thus encaged unless it has been set aflame (see Flamable Body below). An encaged foe can force its way out with a successful grapple check. An encaged victim can also cut its way out by using claws or a light slashing weapon to deal 15 points of damage. Once the creature exits, the wicker reknits; another swallowed opponent must cut its own way out.

The wicker man's interior can hold three Large, six Medium-size, twelve Small, twenty-four Tiny, forty-eight Diminutive, or ninety-six Fine or smaller opponents.

**Construct Traits:** Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, disease, and similar effects. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

**Flammable Body (Ex):** When exposed to fire, a wicker man instantly bursts into flame. Anyone within 30 feet of a burning wicker man must make a Fortitude save (DC 16) or suffer 1d6 points of heat damage from the intense heat. Treat this effect as an emanation (see Aiming a Spell, page 148 in the *Player's Handbook*). Anyone touched by a burning wicker man must make a Reflex save (DC 16) or take 2d6 points of fire damage. Foes grappling with a burning wicker man suffer 4d6 points of fire damage, and foes encaged within a wicker man while it is burning suffer 6d6 points of fire damage each round. (Thus a foe encaged within a burning wicker man who attempts escape by grappling would suffer 6d6 points of fire damage on the wicker man's initiative and another 4d6 points of fire damage when making a grapple attempt to escape.) A wicker man will burn for 10 minutes. After it has finished burning it cannot be relit by fire or fire-based effects until 5 rounds have passed.

**Improved Grab:** To use this ability the wicker man must hit with a slam attack. If it gets a hold, it automatically deals slam damage and can attempt to encage the foe.

**Magic Immunity (Ex):** Wicker men are immune to all spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural effects, except as follows. A *warp wood* or *wood shape* spell heals 2d8 points damage. Fire and fire-based effects engage the wicker man's Flammable Body ability.

**Piercing Immunity (Ex):** Piercing weapons, even magic ones, deal no damage to a wicker man.

## The Thunderbird

*When a vision comes from the thunder beings of the West, it comes with terror like a thunder storm; but when the vision has passed, the world is greener and happier. For wherever the truth of vision comes upon the world, it is like rain. The world, you see, is happier after the terror of the storm..."*

*—Black Elk*

The thunderbird appears in the legends of many Native American tribes. In most, it soars into the stories of tribal shamans some time shortly after the creation of the world. Many view the thunderbird as a god-like figure, one of the many great spirits. To the Kwakiutl it was a teacher; from it they learned to build houses. To the Quillayute it was a savior, bringing the starving tribe the carcass of a whale to feed upon. An Assiniboin legend says, ". . . the old Thunder, or big bird, is wise and excellent, he never kills or injures anyone." Yet this benevolence could be ascribed to the creature out of fear, for the legends of other tribes hold the thunderbird to be an evil demon-spirit, a creature of nightmarish terror that descends from storm clouds to hunt and kill men and beasts.

The Comanche have a legend in which a hunter was struck dead by lightning after accidentally shooting a large bird that he thought was the thunderbird. The Winnabego say, "Thunder is a spirit, and it is an emblem or war. It is winged, mighty, and awful, and it is called the thunderbird." The Mandan believed that the thunderbird caused storms, and the Chippewa said the thunderbird had eyes of fire and that its glance was lightning. The Iliini have legends of a huge bird that carries off unwary hunters. In some Native American stories, the thunderbird decimates whole villages. The Illini were periodically attacked by such a thunderbird that would carry away tribesmen to distant mountaintops. There it would rip open their bellies to devour their innards and peck a hole in their skulls to pluck out their brains. A painted boulder is said to have existed near Alton, Illinois that told the story of Chief Ouatago and his band of braves, who killed the thunderbird that had been attacking their tribe.

*"These thunderbirds are part of the Great Spirit. Theirs is about the greatest power in the whole universe. It is the power of the hot and the cold clashing above the clouds. It is blue lightning from the sun."*

*—Lame Deer*

The thunderbird makes a startling appearance in the tall tales of the Wild West. In 1890, two cowboys were riding through the Arizona desert when they spotted an enormous bird. Shocked, afraid, and excited, they did what any cowboys would do: They pulled out their guns and shot it dead. Amazed by the body that landed on the earth, they tied it to their horses and dragged the huge carcass back to town. There they told their stories to the local newspaper, the *Tombstone Epigraph*, which reported the strange creature's wingspan to be a fantastic 160 feet. Its head, reported the paper, was 8 feet long, and its wings were "composed of a thick and nearly transparent membrane."

Such a tall tale would have faded into obscurity were it not for the peculiar deaths of those involved. A sketch was included with the story that showed a group of more than twenty men holding up the extended wings of the creature. When word of the story spread, investigators sought out the men pictured in the sketch. Most could not be found, and many believe that they never existed. A shaken few, however, know better—twelve of the men pictured in the sketch were struck and killed by lightning.

## Thunderbird

**Huge Magical Beast**
**Hit Dice:** 12d10+50 (116 hp)
**Initiative:** +2 (Dex)
**Speed:** 20 ft., fly 200 ft. (average)
**AC:** 18 (-2 size, +2 Dex, +8 natural)
**Attacks:** 2 claws +18 melee, bite +13 melee
**Damage:** Claw 2d4+8, bite 2d6+4
**Face/Reach:** 10 ft. by 20 ft./10 ft
**Special Attacks:** Lightning strike, snatch, thunder clap
**Special Qualities:** Control weather, immunities
**Saves:** Fort +13, Ref +10, Will +6
**Abilities:** Str 26, Dex 15, Con 20, Int 7, Wis 14, Cha 11
**Skills:** Spot +10, Listen +9, Move Silently +9
**Feats:** Flyby Attack, Multiattack, Power Attack

**Climate/Terrain:** Any hill or mountain
**Organization:** Solitary or clutch (2-4)
**Challenge Rating:** 11
**Treasure:** None
**Alignment:** Often neutral evil
**Advancement:** 13-16 HD (Huge); 17-36 HD (Gargantuan)

Thunderbirds are giant reptilian flyers with a long, slender, toothy beak. Their huge, semitransparent bat-like wings reveal many veins and an impressive musculature. A thunderbird's hairless body ranges in color from blue to green to black. Often great flocks of many kinds of birds can be seen following a thunderbird in flight. The

thunderbird has no special affinity for these animals; they merely follow in the thunderbird's wake and use the updrafts its huge and hot body provides.

Thunderbirds are holdovers from an earlier age gifted with a malevolent but dim intelligence by the Red Death. They hunt in any area where cattle, horses, or deer can be found in abundance, and they don't mind preying on humans when the populations of their usual food gets low.

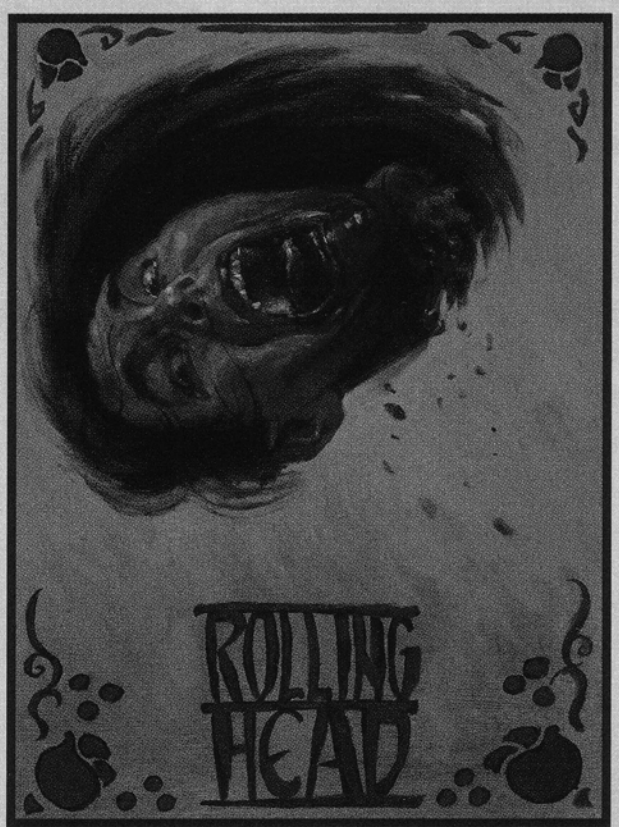
## Combat

Thunderbirds use clouds for cover, creating storms to cause their prey to go to ground. When prey has stopped moving, the thunderbird strikes it with its lighting gaze. If this attack does not kill the prey, the thunderbird swoops in to stun prey with a thunder clap. Stunned prey is carried up to a great height and then dropped.

**Control Weather (Su):** Thunderbirds can control the weather as per the spell *control weather* as though cast by a 16th-level druid. Thunderbirds can use this ability at will, but weather changes are gradual, taking 10 minutes as described by the spell.

**Immunities:** Thunderbirds are immune to electricity and sonic attacks.

**Lightning Strike (Su):** Every 4 rounds, a thunderbird can shoot a powerful stroke of electrical energy from its eyes. A line of lightning, 5 feet wide, 5 feet tall, and up to 100 feet long issues forth from the thunder bird's eyes and causes 12d6 points of damage. Creatures that make a Reflex save (DC 21) take half damage.




**Snatch (Ex):** A thunderbird that hits a Medium-size or smaller creature with a claw attack can attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it gets a hold, it can fly off with its prey and deal automatic claw damage, though it often drops foes from a height. Large creatures can be snatched in a similar fashion if both claws hit. Large creatures suffer automatic damage from both claws. The thunderbird can drop carried creatures as a free action, which deals normal falling damage if the thunderbird is flying.

**Thunder Clap (Su):** Thunderbirds can clap their wings together to create a thunderous boom. Creatures within 60 feet suffer 2d8 points of sonic damage and must make a Fortitude save (DC 21) or be stunned for 2 rounds.

## Rolling Heads

Native American legends contain creatures both benevolent and malevolent. Some, like the thunderbird, have both good and evil aspects, and some, like the undead horrors described in the "rolling head" legends, are undeniably evil.

*"Well, since I have killed meat sooner than I thought, I brought it back to camp. Children, where is your mother?" the man asked, knowing the answer.*

*"She has gone out to get water," replied the man's daughter.*

*"Then she will be here soon. In the mean time I will cook something for you to eat, and then will go out to get the meat I left in the trees so that wolves would not take it." Their father took the side of ribs he had brought home with him and cooked it. Then he gave it to his children and left, planning never to return.*

*His children ate and as they did the little boy, the younger of the two, turned to his sister and said, "Sister, this tastes like mother..."*

*—Cheyanne legend, "The Children Who Ran From Their Mother"*

As legend has it, once there was a lonely lodge out in the woods where a man, his wife, and two children lived. This man would wake up each morning, paint his wife red from head to foot, and then go out hunting. Every day when he returned, his wife was washed clean. One day he asked his son and daughter where their mother went when he was out hunting. They said to him, "Whenever you go out hunting, mother goes to fetch water, and she is usually gone for a long time." This made the man suspicious, and the next day, instead of going hunting, he went down to the shore and hid himself in a hole. Soon his wife came to the beach and

slipped off her dress, saying, "I am here." In some versions of the legend the creature that rose from the water to couple with the woman was a huge snake, in others it was a water spirit of some sort. The end result is always the same.

*"When the man saw this, he rose from his hiding place, rushed down to the pair, cut the monster to pieces with his knife, and cut off his wife's head. The pieces of the monster crept and rolled back into the water—they were not seen again. The man cut off the woman's arms at the elbow, and her legs at the knees, and threw these pieces and her head in the water, saying, 'Take your wife.' Then he opened the body, and took out a side of her ribs. He skinned the side of ribs and then returned to the lodge."*

*—from Legends and Lore of the American Indians, edited by Terri Hardin*

The children are waiting in the lodge for their father to return when they hear someone outside calling to be let in and saying, "I love my children, but they do not love me. They have eaten me." When they open the door, they see their mother's severed head leaping at them. The children run for miles, using magic to put brambles, forests, and, in some stories, mountains in their mother's path, all to no avail. The furiously rolling head of their mother continues to follow despite all barriers. At last, the children place a body of water too large for their mother to jump across behind them and their mother's severed head drowns in it and is not heard from again.

In the world of Gothic Earth, the rolling head legends are more than fables. The Cheyanne and Blackfeet have long been aware that such vile undead are a possible consequence of cannibalism. But unlike the curses that create the wendigo, or ghoul, rolling heads are created from the body of the person eaten, and it is almost universally true that the eater and the eaten must somehow be intimately related. The vengeful spirit, feeling betrayed, animates its old head and seeks to eat those who cannibalized its body. It does not limit its revenge to those who offended it, however: Anyone the rolling head meets is a potential meal.

The rolling head seeks to chew off the heads of others. These severed heads become rolling heads themselves and follow their progenitor in its quest for vengeance. Being sadistic spirits, the rolling heads enjoy eating the loved ones of their hated targets so that their heads can join in the pursuit… and the feast. The spirits of rolling heads will rest only when they have killed the original offenders. If the offenders die before that can happen, the rolling heads continue to roam, attacking whatever creatures they come across. Native American shamans believe the rolling heads were originally created long ago by the Great Spirit as punishment for those people who could not tell the difference between men and animals.

## Rolling Head

**Tiny Undead**
**Hit Dice:** 1/2d12+3 (6 hp)
**Initiative:** +2 (Dex)
**Speed:** 30 ft.
**AC:** 14 (+2 size, +2 Dex)
**Attacks:** Bite +2 melee
**Damage:** Bite 1d3 and poison
**Face/Reach:** 1 ft. by 1 ft./0 ft
**Special Attacks:** Create spawn, poison
**Special Qualities:** Undead traits, damage reduction 15/+1, scent, SR 15, water vulnerability
**Saves:** Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +2
**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 15, Con —, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 11
**Skills:** Spot +10, Jump +10, Listen +10
**Feats:** Toughness

**Climate/Terrain:** Any land
**Organization:** Solitary or gang (2-4)
**Challenge Rating:** 1
**Treasure:** None
**Alignment:** Always chaotic evil
**Advancement:** —

Rolling retain memories of their former life, but every recollection is twisted by hatred and rage. Despite their lack of vocal cords or breath, they can speak, and enjoy tormenting and taunting prey.

## Combat

Rolling heads generally focus their attacks on one individual, hoping to paralyze that person and get the opportunity to make a coup de grace attack. They're aware of their vulnerability to water and will become wary when they smell a large body of water on the wind.

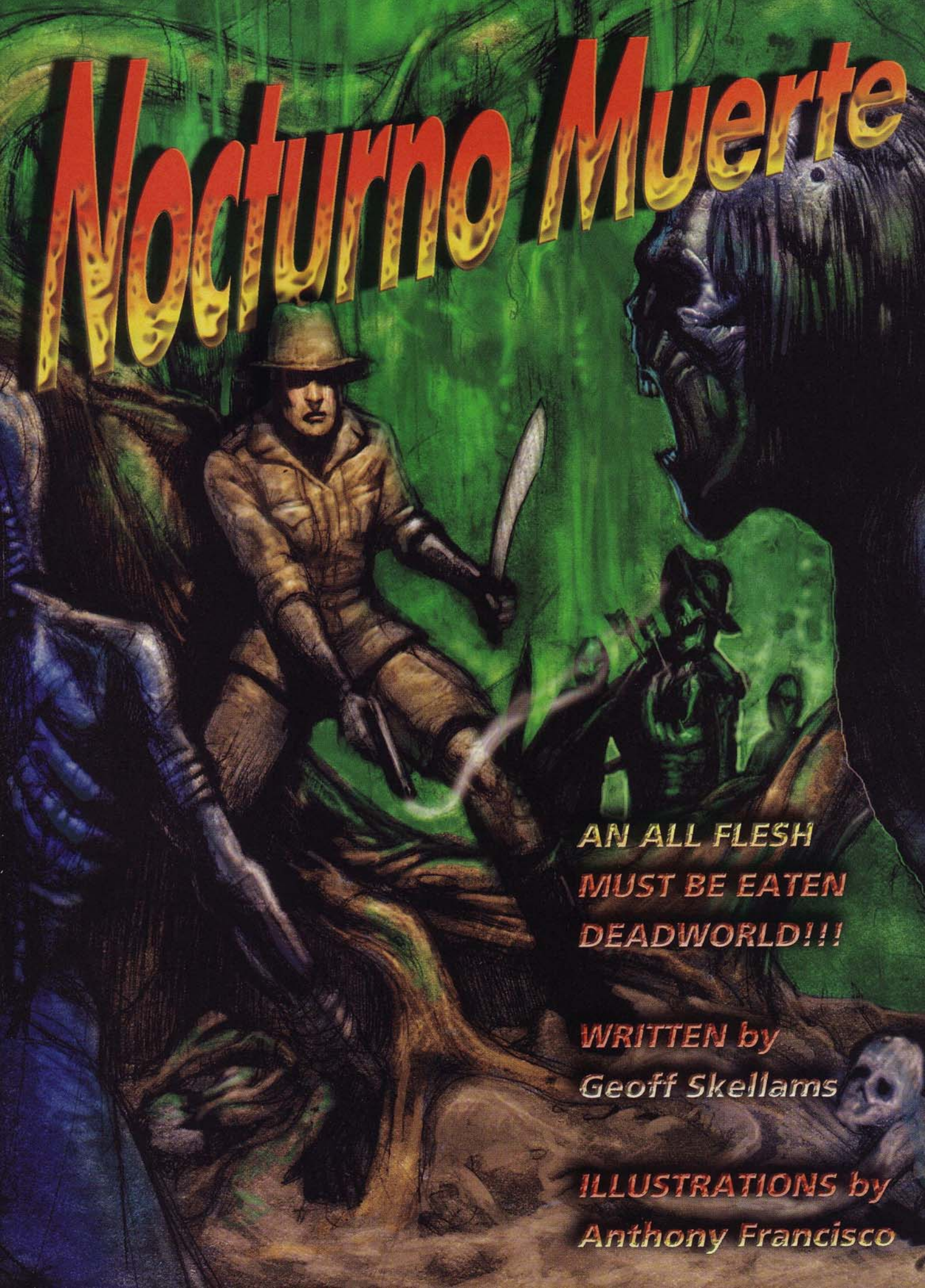
**Create Spawn (Su):** If a rolling head kills a Small or Medium-sized humanoid while the humanoid is paralyzed by the rolling head's poison, the head of the creature separates from the body and becomes a rolling head under the control of its killer.

**Poison (Ex):** Bite, Fortitude save (DC 11); initial damage paralyzed for 1 minute, secondary damage paralyzed for another 5d6 minutes.

**Undead Traits:** Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

**Water Vulnerability:** Although undead, rolling heads can "drown" when submerged in water. If a rolling head is submerged in water and it cannot roll out within 5 rounds, it is destroyed. Holy water deals double damage to a rolling head.

**Skills:** Rolling heads are not limited by their height when employing the Jump skill. Rolling heads can always take 10 on a Jump skill check, even when threatened or in a stressful situation.


Nocturno Muerte
AN ALL FLESH MUST BE EATEN DEADWORLD!!!
WRITTEN by Geoff Skellams
ILLUSTRATIONS by Anthony Francisco

# THE AMAZON BASIN
# JUNE, 1936

Dan Michaels pushed back his battered fedora, wiped the sweat from his forehead, and took another drag on his cigarette. He looked out across the river; the muddy, brown expanse of the Amazon rolled serenely by as though nothing was happening. He flicked the cigarette butt out into the water and turned back to his work.

Grunting, he hauled the second-to-last crate from the hatch in the front of the Grumman Goose seaplane and stacked it with the others on the dock. "As soon as this expedition is over, I'm heading back to Chicago," he muttered to himself. "I've had it with this God-forsaken place."

The harsh screech of a macaw announced shuffling footsteps down the dock. Dan straightened and saw his local contact coming toward him. The little man wore a sweat-stained suit that might have been cream once upon a time, but age and the environment had conspired against it. He fished a handkerchief from the breast pocket of his jacket and dabbed his forehead.

Dan pulled his fedora back down to get the sun out his eyes. "Mister Caldeva! So good of you to come and help with the unloading of the plane. I couldn't have done it without you!"

The little man dabbed his forehead quickly again. "I am so sorry, Señor Michaels. A small problem with the expedition has arisen and I was sure you would have liked me to deal with it before coming to help you."

Dan's eyes narrowed. "Problem?" he snarled. "What *kind* of problem?"

Caldeva smiled weakly, holding his hands up to placate Dan. "Señor! Señor! It is not as bad as you might think! It's just that, well, just that some of the native porters have heard where we are heading and they have refused to have anything more to do with the expedition!"

Dan spat. "Dammit! You *promised* me that these natives would toe the line if we paid them enough! What d'ya mean they're refusing to come?"

"I assure you, Señor, it was nothing that I had done!" said Caldeva. "I had not told the porters where our destination was, lest they realized that we were heading for the valley of the night death. The natives are so very superstitious about such things?"

Dan frowned. *Natives always are*. "So how did they find out about it, then?"

"A German gentleman, Señor Mueller, has been asking questions about the valley," said Caldeva. "He somehow got wind of the destination of your expedition and asked one too many questions."

"Mueller? What does that fascist yes-man want in these parts?"

"From what I understand, Señor, he is looking for the same thing that you are: artifacts from the lost city."

"That son of a bitch!" Dan said. "I thought I had shaken him in La Paz. He's getting a nasty habit of appearing at the wrong place at the wrong time. Well, you know what this means, don't you?"

Caldeva shook his head. "No, Señor. What does it mean?"

Dan took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his forehead again. "It means, my good man, that we have to head out tonight. We don't have any time to waste. Get together whatever natives you can. Double their wages if you have to. Just get them."

Caldeva sighed. "Si, Señor. I will do what I can," he said as he turned to leave.

Dan looked at Caldeva's retreating back. "You'd better, amigo. I'm not letting that Hun get the better of me again. No sir, not this time. I don't care *what's* out there."

*Dan Michaels, well-known explorer and archaeologist, has failed to return from an expedition deep into the Amazon back to his backers here in Chicago three weeks ago. No word has been heard as to Michaels' whereabouts or condition, and he is presumed lost in the jungle. A spokesman for the Museum has declined to comment on what Michaels was doing in the jungle at the time of his disappearance.*

*It is unknown whether a search party will be arranged to look for him. Reliable sources have reported some reluctance on the part of the Museum's financial backers. There have been unconfirmed stories of a German expedition disappearing around the same time.*

*Extracted from the Chicago Tribune*
*September 22 1986*

## What is All Flesh Must Be Eaten?

*All Flesh Must Be Eaten* (*AFMBE*) is Eden Studio's zombie-infested roleplaying game of horror survival. In a nutshell, the players are among the humans trying to survive in an environment overrun by zombies, in a style similar to *Army of Darkness* or George Romero's *Living Dead* movies. Unlike in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®, not all zombies in *AFMBE* are created equal. The core rulebook features a chapter on creating your own zombies using a wide variety of different "attributes." Some attributes cover how intelligent the zombies are, how they need to feed, and so on.

*AFMBE* is essentially a framework. The rules provide you with the basics to run a group of players through a survival situation. But the game also gives you a variety of possible "deadworlds" —different settings featuring a wide variety of zombies that the PCs have to overcome, of which this is an example. The core rulebook has eleven different deadworlds, ranging from modern day settings to Nazi occult experiments to alien invasions to post nuclear holocaust survival.

Eden Studios is producing a range of supplements for the game. Already announced are *Enter the Zombie* (featuring zombie versions of the Hong Kong action movie genre), *A Fist Full of Zombies* (zombie westerns) and *Pulp Zombies* (zombies in the twenties, thirties and forties).

# HISTORY

Over three thousand years ago, the valley of Nocturno Muerte—situated in a remote a remote corner of the Amazon rainforest—was home to the Xinca, one of South America's most advanced ancient civilizations. Their incredibly complex society featured a well-defined class structure, advanced architecture and engineering programs, and a high quality of life for all the nation's citizens.

Priests, who comprised less than one percent of the total population, dominated the region's highest social class, acting as teachers, government officials, and judicial system, all rolled into one. They managed the running of the basic infrastructure of the society and kept the rest of the population in its place.

The Xinca's extremely complicated religion boasted a strictly codified set of laws that needed to be obeyed by the whole of the population in order for the world to continue to function normally. There was only one penalty for an infraction of the law—the spilling of blood as a sacrifice to appease the anger of the gods. For minor offences, this involved the removing of a finger or perhaps a whole hand. In more extreme cases, criminals were sacrificed on the altar, their hearts cut out and burnt.

But the ultimate penalty was reserved for anyone caught using the sorcerous arts. The Xinca considered magic an affront to the power of the gods—an attempt by a mortal to raise him or herself to the level of the gods themselves. The priests locked anyone caught using sorcery inside a wooden box big enough only to hold the offender in the fetal position. They then poured fire ants into the box through a small hole in the lid. After he spent a day in the box, the sorcerer was staked out on a stone platform and special mirrors were used to focus the sun's energy on his or her skin, hot enough to give third degree burns, but not strong enough to kill. The priests believed that the light from the sun was the anger of Zintounoac, the Sun God, and only the god had the power to clean away the taint of the sorcerer's foul magic. Only when the sorcerer's skin was blistered and bleeding would the priests prepare him for sacrifice in the usual way.

Few in the Xincan society even contemplated sorcery, let alone practiced it. Those who risked their lives for the power usually did so in caves or small huts deep in the jungle, many miles away from the main city. Most only dabbled in the art, knowing only the rituals for minor spells.

But one man dedicated his life to the sorcerous arts and excelled at them to a degree unrivalled by any other person in Xincan history. Tiltounaca was a minor priest who helped maintain the great library in the city. He was one of a select few charged with protecting the sorcerous knowledge of the Xincan people, locked away and hidden from the vast majority of the population. Tiltounaca succumbed to temptation and started reading and practicing the banned material; before long, he was

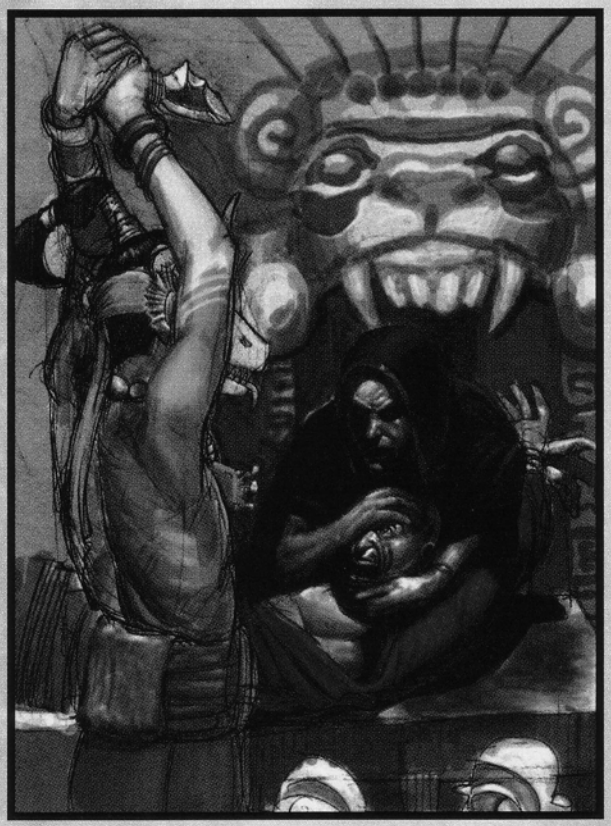
far more powerful than any sorcerer in Xincan history.

For three years, Tiltounaca worked at his sorcery, eventually learning to cast his spells without the need for elaborate rituals or materials. He also became fascinated with life after death and developed spells to reanimate the dead, although the results were fairly primitive. These experiments led to his discovery and ultimate capture. Had he managed to evade capture, he may well have been able to perfect his walking dead, making them indistinguishable from the living.

As the priests tortured him, Tiltounaca cast what was to become his final and most devastating spell. He cursed the whole valley, so that anyone who entered it would never leave and any that died inside it would rise from the dead come nightfall, filled with an insatiable desire to consume the still-beating hearts of the living. The priests, while scared of Tiltounaca's curse, took little heed and sacrificed him anyway.

The priests considered Tiltounaca's sorcerous taint so great that several of their caste offered themselves as sacrifices at the same time to help convince the gods that the people truly were repentant. Even the high priest laid himself on the altar to have his heart cut from his chest. In all, fourteen priests were sacrificed that morning alongside Tiltounaca.

But true to Tiltounaca's word, as soon as night had fallen, the fifteen sacrifice victims arose and went on the rampage. For the rest of the night, the shambling corpses shuffled around the city, tearing the hearts from the chests of anyone they could catch. Once they had feasted on the victim's heart, they shuffled off looking for their next kill. Over a hundred people died that first night.



The confusion in the priesthood's ranks the next morning was indescribable. With the massive death toll, the priests fell back on the only knowledge they had: the wrath of the gods must be appeased by human sacrifice. The blood of twenty more people was spilt that day as the priests struggled to avoid another night of carnage.

But as night fell, the dead rose again. Not only did the sacrifice victims themselves rise, but so too did the victims of the previous night. Now numbering nearly one hundred and fifty, the walking dead filled the streets of the city with the blood of the living.

Within three weeks, the Xinca people were extinct. The dead had been gruesomely efficient, and not a single human within the nation's borders was able to survive. Some people tried barricading themselves in makeshift fortresses and were able to hold out against the dead for a while, but the dead eventually overwhelmed their positions and consumed them, too.

With the living all gone, the corpses lapsed to a dormant state, to await fresh food...

## IN SEARCH OF RICHES UNTOLD

For hundreds of years, local natives have feared the valley. Despite the persistent stories of the ruins of some ancient civilization and the untold riches hidden there, the valley has been shunned altogether. To the locals, the valley is a place of death and unspeakable evil; any who dare to enter are never seen again. Early Spanish explorers several hundred years ago heard of the valley from locals and named it Nocturno Muerte—Night Death.

In the early 1930s, American and European explorers and scientists began to hear the stories of the valley of Nocturno Muerte as they interviewed local tribes. Details were cloudy, but the impression most got was of a valley rich in treasure, but abandoned hundreds of years earlier by its inhabitants. Most simply discounted the stories of the curse on the valley.

Several early expeditions set out in search of the valley and its lost city; all of them vanished without trace. Fellow explorers simply thought that the groups had gotten lost in the thick jungle or they had fallen afoul of one of the many tribes that still lived wild in the depths of the wilderness.

That was until the diary of Frank Yestler was found floating in the Amazon by the French explorer, Jacques Yves-d'Errique, in 1934. Yestler, an English anthropologist, was a member of the latest expedition to have disappeared searching for Nocturno Muerte. His diary covered the journey through the jungle and his party's arrival at the mouth of the valley. From there, the details seemed incredibly sketchy, as though Yestler had been delirious when writing the journal. It briefly mentioned the vast riches that the expedition had found simply lying around, but quickly degenerated into mad rants of walking monsters that came in the night and tales of

how the native porters complained of powerful sorcery.

Shortly after Yves-d'Errique had found the diary and shared his discovery with several other explorers at a trading post on the Amazon, the Frenchman was found dead in the river, his bones picked partially clean by the fish. No sign of the diary was ever found.

Yves-d'Errique had been murdered by Dieter Fankmann, a German archaeologist working for Heinrich Himmler and the Nazi party. Fankmann had been sent to South America in search of ancient relics, in the hope that they might be of some occult value. After hearing Yves-d'Errique's recounting of the contents of the diary, Fankmann killed the Frenchman late one night and took the diary for himself. After sending a coded message to Berlin, Fankmann quickly gathered an expedition and set out to follow the trail of clues in Yestler's diary. He too suffered the same fate as all the other expeditions.

Despite the disappearance of every person who had gone in search of the valley and its riches, over the next two years, four other expeditions set out to be the first ones to recover the treasure and return to civilization alive. Of the last two, the American treasure hunter Dan Michaels led one and the Nazi archaeologist, Frans Mueller, led the other.

Michaels's expedition, funded mostly by wealthy benefactors from the Field Natural History Museum in Chicago, departed from Miguel's trading post ten weeks ago. No one at the trading post has heard from him since. Many of the native porters who Michaels signed on for the expedition have returned, but they claimed they had turned back before they entered the valley, lest they fall foul of the valley's curse.

The German expedition was arranged and funded by Heinrich Himmler himself. Himmler, the head of Nazi Germany's secret police, is obsessed with the occult and had read Yestler's diary and felt that whatever mystical treasure the valley was hiding was something that was better off in the hands of the Reich. Mueller, one of Himmler's trusted archaeologists, had been hot on Michaels's trail, leaving a week later. The German expedition has not returned from the jungle as yet, but they claimed they had not planned on returning for three months. Bookmakers at the trading post are running a pool on whether the expedition will actually make it out alive.

## GETTING TO THE VALLEY

The closest sign of civilization to the valley of Nocturno Muerte lies over fifty miles away, a trading post known only as "Miguel's." Originally run by Miguel Juarez, who disappeared on one of the first expeditions to the valley, the trading post consists of three dilapidated buildings on the banks of a slow-flowing tributary of the Amazon. Most basic supplies—food, ammunition, older firearms, ropes, canvas bags and the like—are available here at ludicrously inflated prices.

Travel to Miguel's is really only feasible by boat or plane. A supply boat makes the run up the river once every two weeks, bringing with it the mail, fresh food supplies, and news from the rest of the world. Miguel's does have a shortwave radio unit, but the surrounding mountains make radio communication patchy at the best of times, and completely impossible if the weather is at all bad.

Air travel to Miguel's is a very rare occurrence and limited to planes capable of landing on the river. There is no permanent airstrip on land near the trading post; the thick jungle and uneven terrain makes building one an unfeasible operation considering the minuscule number of travelers who visit the trading post.

The only way to get to the valley of Nocturno Muerte is by boat. After departing from Miguel's, the boat needs to head up river for thirty miles, until it reaches a fork in the river where the main waterway is joined by a smaller, much narrower tributary.

Travel up the narrow waterway is difficult. The thick jungle encroaches on both sides of the river and vines hanging from the canopy catch on the boat's superstructure. The water's depth is also quite variable, with sandbars building up and disappearing with regular monotony. No two trips up the river are the same and the chance of actually running aground is very high if the pilot does not keep a constant lookout.

Five miles from the mouth of the valley, a lone stone statue marks the point where the trek on foot must begin. The statue, a stylized jaguar, is covered with moss and creepers, making it somewhat difficult to spot. The wreckage of several boats from previous expeditions lies in the general area, making the point slightly easier to find.

From the river, an overgrown trail winds its way up through the jungle toward the mouth of the river. Successive expeditions have carved their way through using machetes, but the jungle does not take long to regrow; the vines and underbrush will begin to cover the path again within weeks of a party passing through.

All along the path, again hidden by the foliage, are a series of stone jaguar statues. Remnants of the ancient Xincan culture, the priesthood placed them here to ward evil spirits away from the valley. Time has worn away most of the more intricate carvings on the statues, leaving only the deepest features.

A sheer cliff, over one hundred feet tall, marks the entrance to the valley. Water from a small creek tumbles over the edge in a spectacular waterfall, into a crystal-clear pool at the base of the cliff. The water spray has fostered the growth of moss and lichens on the rocks surrounding the pool, giving them a bright green appearance and making them exceedingly slippery.

Travel to the top of the cliff and the entrance to the valley proper is a difficult one. Previous expeditions have hammered pitons into the cliff face, but the humidity and high temperatures have corroded all but the most recent, making them unreliable at best. In two places, the rotting remains of ropes dangle down the cliff—they are not strong enough to carry the weight of a man and will snap off should anyone try to climb them.

The underbrush surrounding the pool and the cliff are littered with the corpses of people who thought dying in the fall was preferable to dying at the hands of the undead. The bodies vary in age and state of decay, from moss-covered skeletons through to the rotting remains of one of Michaels's party.

## THE VALLEY ITSELF

Nestled between a pair of sheer-sided mountains whose tops are usually shrouded in cloud, the valley is covered with a thick, lush jungle. Untamed for thousands of years, the jungle has reclaimed the remnants of the Xincan civilization, hiding it from all but the most inquisitive souls.

The valley itself is some twenty miles long and five miles across at its widest point. Between the two mountains, the ground undulates unevenly, with little flat ground existing anywhere in the valley. Thick, ancient growth forest covers the whole area. Vines and creepers stretch across the game trails, further hampering exploration.

About a mile from the edge of the valley stand the ruins of the ancient Xincan temple. The building, once the pride of the Xincan nation, now stands consumed by the jungle, its carvings hidden under inches of moss. Age has conspired against the building, with many of the stones displaced by earthquakes and the jungle itself.

The temple is approximately five hundred feet square at the base, rising in a step pyramid style some one hundred feet above the jungle floor. The old stairs that once climbed to the altar on the top platform have been eroded away by thousands for years of rainfall and neglect. Around each layer of the pyramid are carved scenes and statues depicting the glory of the Xincan gods and the rituals that used to dominate Xincan life. Many have eroded away thanks to the constant flowing of water over the millennia and are no longer clearly visible.

The altar itself at the top of the pyramid is still there, although it has been cracked in two. The two halves lie scattered at either side of the platform, broken in half by the remnants of the Xincan priesthood when they realized that further sacrifices were only doing more harm than good.

Beyond the temple, stretching for nearly two miles, lie the ruins of the Xincan capital. Many of the buildings were made from timber, and they have long since rotted away. Some of the more important buildings, particularly those with links to the priesthood, were made of stone and some of these have weathered the test of time and remain mostly upright, although heavily overgrown. Many others were destroyed in the initial onslaught of the zombies, their stones scattered through the jungle.

Throughout the ruins, buried in centuries of debris, are the treasures of the lost Xincan civilization. Like many other South American cultures, the Xincan were master goldsmiths. Nearly every household had at least one gold effigy of one of the Xincan gods; the treasures remain in their original resting place, protected by the sheer lethality of the valley and its undead inhabitants. Just how much treasure is buried in the ruins is unknown—no one has remained alive in the valley long enough to actually find out.

During the days, the valley floor is usually shrouded with a light mist and rainfall is a common occurrence. Streams and creeks trickle down through the jungle and flow into the main creek that tumbles over the cliff at the end of the valley. This water helps keep the jungle's myriad plants, animals, birds, and insects alive.

The valley has the strange ability to confuse those who wander through it. The rocks in the mountains are magnetic, causing compass needles to spin erratically. The jungle itself even seems to have the ability to confuse the minds of those who enter it—they get lost easily, moving in circles, unable to find the waterfall that marks the entrance to the valley.

But it is not the poisonous snakes or the jaguars that are the primary danger in the jungle of Nocturno Muerte, it is the night death themselves, the zombies. Over three thousand zombies are scattered through the jungle. Most of them are dormant and will rise only when they sense a living human somewhere nearby. Tiltounaca's curse remains in effect to this day—anyone dying in the valley will rise again the following night to join the undead hordes.

Every morning, the power of Tiltounaca's spell wanes and the zombies fall dormant. This is a gradual thing, with the undead slowly losing energy as the sun rises, eventually heading into the jungle and finding a place to

wait for the sun to set. Most of the undead will find somewhere out of direct sunlight to wait for nightfall, either covering themselves with leaf litter or hiding inside something like a ruined building or a hollow tree. Finding the zombies during the day is a very difficult proposition.

Tiltounaca's curse has had a strange side effect. No human corpse in the valley will ever decompose by itself. The zombified bodies of Tiltounaca himself and the original Xincan priests still shamble around when they sense a human heart nearby. The only common feature of all the zombies is that they have a gaping open wound in their chest, where their still-beating hearts have been torn from their bodies and devoured by the undead. The rest of the organs in the chest cavity remain visible, which usually causes revulsion in those who see one of the zombies up close.

While the bodies of the zombies may not rot, the same cannot be said of their clothes. Most of the zombies of the original Xincans are either naked or wear the badly preserved remains of their ancient clothing, while many of the newer undead wear the clothes they had on when they entered the valley. It's possible to see Xincan priests and Spanish conquistadors alongside modern day explorers. It doesn't matter who a person is—it's their beating heart that the zombies want.

The only way to destroy one of the zombies is to destroy its brain. How this is done isn't all that important; cremating a corpse will have the same effect as driving a stake into its forehead or putting a shotgun against its temple and pulling the trigger.
Unfortunately, most people who enter the valley don't live long enough to discover this and even if they do, the sheer weight of zombie numbers usually overwhelms them before they can get out alive.

### Nocturno Muerte Zombies

**Strength:** 2 **Constitution** 2
**Dexterity** 1 **Intelligence** -2
**Perception** 3 **Willpower** 2
**Dead Points** 15 **Speed** 2
**Endurance Points** n/a **Essence Pool** 6
**Attack:** Bite damage D4x2(4) slashing
**Weak Spot:** Brain
**Getting Around:** Slow And Steady; The Lunge
**Strength:** Dead Joe Average
**Senses:** Like A Hawk; Life Sense
**Sustenance:** Daily; Sweet Meats (heart)
**Intelligence:** Dumb As Dead Wood
**Spreading the Love:** Only the Dead
**Power:** 13
**Special:** The Nocturno Muerte zombies are nocturnal. The light of the sun, while not dangerous to them, renders them inactive. As soon as the sun sets, they rise up if they can sense a living human being nearby.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

Despite the constant nightly threat of the zombies, five humans manage to survive in the valley. The first is Dan Michaels, the sole survivor of the Field Natural History Museum-funded expedition that disappeared several months ago. The other four are Hans Mueller and three of his Nazi soldiers.

Michaels has been in the valley the longest and is the sole surviving member of his expedition. He had little trouble finding the valley; but because of his rushed departure from the trading post, he did not have all the supplies he had originally planned for. He was particularly low on ammunition, which was supposed to arrive on the next riverboat.

The first night was the worst for Michaels's group. With night falling, the undead near the camp arose, sensing the abundance of living flesh nearby. Over the course of the night, nearly fifty zombies attacked the camp, killing everyone except for Michaels and one of the native porters. Michaels used all of the ammunition he had that night, and barely escaped having his heart ripped from his chest.

## Dan Michaels

**Strength** 3 **Constitution** 3
**Dexterity** 3 **Intelligence** 3
**Perception** 4 **Willpower** 4
**Life Points** 34 **Speed** 12
**Endurance Points** 35 **Essence Pool** 20

**Qualities/Drawbacks**

Acute Hearing 2, Addiction (Habitual Smoking) 1, Addiction (Habitual Drinking) 1, Adversary (Frans Mueller) 1, Charisma 2, Contacts (Field Museum) 4, Hard to Kill 3, Obsession 2, Paranoid 2, Resistance (Disease) 1, Situation Awareness 2

**Skills**

Brawling 3, Dodge 3, Driving (Car) 3, Driving (Truck) 3, Guns (Handgun) 4, Guns (Shotgun) 3, Humanities (Archeology) 5, Humanities (History) 4, Language (Spanish) 4, Language (Mayan) 2, Myth & Legend (Mayan) 4, Piloting (Motorboat) 3.

**Equipment**

Colt .45 (Empty), longbow, 10 arrows, knife

**Description**

Dan Michaels stands 5'9" tall, with dusty blond hair and deep blue eyes. He normally keeps his craggy face clean shaven, but being stranded alone in the jungle has left him with a scraggly beard and long, matted hair.

His normally smooth-talking demeanor has been worn away by his ordeal and his grip on reality is extremely tenuous. One more disturbing incident and he is likely to go over the edge.

As the sun rose and the zombies disappeared, he took stock of his predicament. He decided that no treasure was worth another night of carnage like that, so he and the remaining guide attempted to retrace their footsteps to the waterfall and freedom. But Tiltounaca's sorcery confused them and the pair spent the rest of the day wandering hopelessly through the jungle. That night, Michaels's last guide joined the growing legion of undead in the valley.

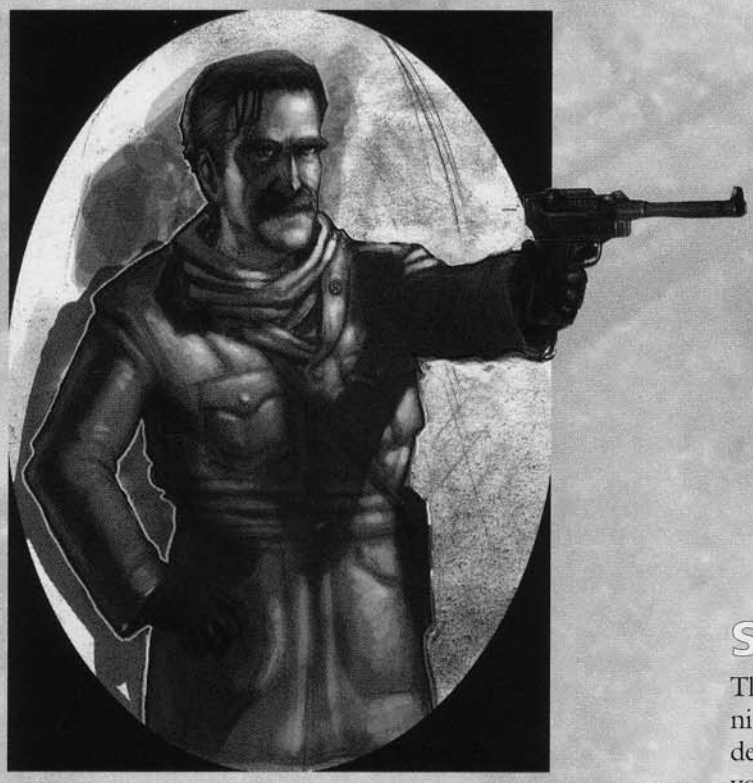
Since then, Dan Michaels has been fighting for his life. Having run out of ammunition weeks ago, he has been using tricks taught to him by natives in other parts of the world. Trapping small birds and animals for food, Michaels survives through sheer willpower alone.

It is unlikely that he will be able to hold on for much longer, however. His grip on reality is slipping with each passing night and the inevitable encounters with the undead. It is only a matter of time before he loses his sanity completely. As such, when (or if) the Cast Members actually find him, he may think they are zombies and act accordingly.

The German expedition, led by Dan Michaels's nemesis, Frans Mueller, has done a better job of surviving the rigors of the jungle. They departed from the trading post a week after Michaels did, and even bought up most of the supplies Michaels had been waiting for. They too found the valley with little difficulty, but waited overnight at the base of the waterfall in order to make the most of the daylight the next day.

After a full day's exploration, the thirty-strong group made camp near the ruins of the Xincan temple and settled in for the night. They too attracted the starving zombies as soon as night fell. However, the Germans fared much better, losing only about half of their party on their first night and most of those were the unarmed native porters. Frans Mueller and the ten SS stormtroopers with him all made it through the night, thanks to their firearms and solid training.

Since then, Mueller has lost the rest of his porters and more than half of the stormtroopers to the undead horde. The Nazis are running low on ammunition, but have enough for at least another week yet. Mueller, obsessed with finding the Xincan artifacts for Himmler, continues to search the ruins of the old city for treasure during the day, retreating to the protection of a makeshift treehouse high in the jungle canopy during the night. They have nearly completed their sweep of the town and are preparing to pack up and head out of the valley, unaware of the curse that lies on the land.



### German SS Stormtroopers

**Strength** 2 **Constitution** 2
**Dexterity** 2 **Intelligence** 2
**Perception** 2 **Willpower** 2
**Life Points** 26 **Speed** 8
**Endurance Points** 23 **Essence Pool** 12

**Skills**

Brawling 2, Climbing 2, Demolitions 2, Dodge 2, Driving (Car) 1, First Aid 1, Guns (Rifle) 2, Hand Weapon (Knife) 2, Stealth 2, Survival (Forest) 2, Swimming 2

**Equipment**

Mauser rifle

### Professor Frans Mueller

**Strength** 2 **Constitution** 3
**Dexterity** 3 **Intelligence** 5
**Perception** 3 **Willpower** 4
**Life Points** 30 **Speed** 12
**Endurance Points** 32 **Essence Pool** 20

**Qualities/Drawbacks**

Adversary (Dan Michaels) 1, Charisma 3, Contacts (Nazi Hierarchy) 5, Covetous 1, Cruel 1, Nerves of Steel 3, Obsession 2, Resources 4, Status 6, Zealot (Nazi Ideology) 3

**Skills**

Bureaucracy 3, Cheating 3, Driving (Car) 3, Guns (Handgun) 4, Humanities (Archeology) 5, Humanities (History) 5, Language (English) 3, Language (Spanish) 3, Language (Mayan) 2, Myth & Legend (Mayan) 3, Smooth Talking 3.

**Equipment**

Luger 9mm Pistol, notebook, chest of Xincan artifacts

**Description**

Frans Mueller is in his early fifties, and his dark hair is streaked with gray. His piercing brown eyes betray his arrogant attitude, especially when he speaks about archeology.

A personal friend of Heinrich Himmler, Mueller strongly supports Nazi ideology and believes that finding ancient artifacts and the accompanying occult knowledge will only help the Third Reich in the future. He uses any means at his disposal to ensure the recovery of any artifacts for the Führer.

## STORY IDEAS

The valley of Nocturno Muerte offers several opportunities for Cast Members to get themselves into a great deal of trouble. Here are some suggestions on how you might incorporate the setting into your campaign.

### Rescue Mission

One of the patrons of the Field History Museum suffers a string of recurring dreams in which Dan Michaels struggles to fight off some monstrous attacker who attempts to tear his heart from his chest. Although the dreams are very disturbing, awaking the man each time he has one, he does not think anything of them. That was until he hears that Michaels had failed to report in after his trip to the lost city.

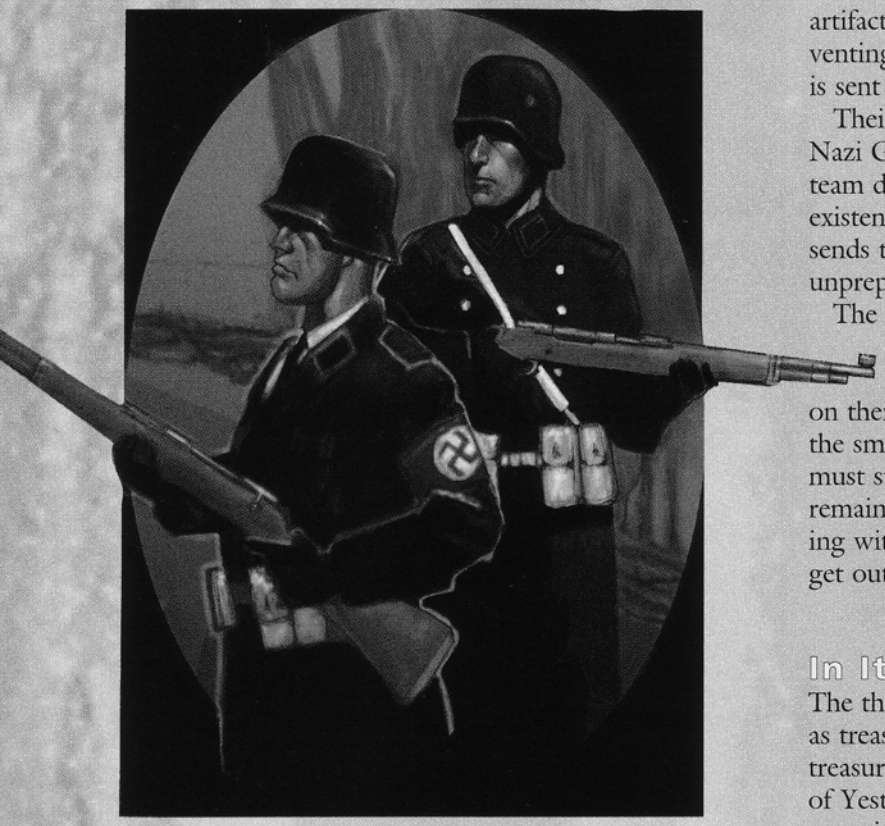
Convinced of foul play, the benefactor arranges a rescue mission, hiring the Cast Members go to the valley to find Michaels and return him safely to civilization. However, the aging man insists on accompanying them personally, making their job that much harder.

If the nighttime attacks from the zombies weren't enough trouble, the remains of the German expedition are between the Cast Members and Michaels. The constant pressure of the zombie attacks has left them mentally unhinged, and they attack the Cast on sight.

Michaels was badly injured in a zombie attack several nights ago and his left leg is broken in several places. Unable to walk, he will need to be carried from the valley, slowing the Cast Members' progress dramatically...

### Denial of Treasure

This hook is particularly good for a military-based team. In it, the Cast Members work for either the American or British military intelligence agencies. Information provided by a German double agent has pointed to a Nazi mission to recover ancient magical



artifacts from the Amazon valley. Tasked with preventing the German recovery at all costs, the Cast is sent on a hunting mission.

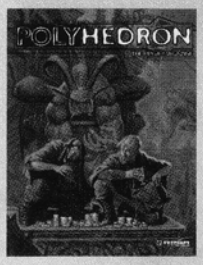
Their job is to ensure the relics never arrive in Nazi Germany and that the German archaeological team disappears. The agency knows nothing of the existence of the undead threat in the valley and sends the Cast Members to the region completely unprepared for what they will have to face.

The Cast Members should be able to make their way to the valley with a minimum of trouble, only to find themselves surrounded on their first night by starving zombies awoken by the smell of fresh meat. For several nights, they must struggle to survive, only to be rescued by the remains of the German expedition. Only by working with their "enemy" can any of them hope to get out of the valley alive.

### In It For The Money

The third option is to position the Cast Members as treasure hunters. They have heard stories of the treasure hidden in the valley, perhaps from a copy of Yestler's diary, or perhaps from snippets of conversations overheard in taverns. Finding the way to the valley is hard enough; finding the treasure and getting out alive is something altogether different.


## ACHTUNG!

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## A WAYFARERS GUIDE TO THE FORGOTTEN REALMS®

BY ED GREENWOOD

***If I was to choose one land in the Borders to watch for great changes in the years ahead, or to birth a genius or tyrant to make all Faerûn tremble, Owlhold would be that land. Wait and see.***

Ghuldribrand Mroster
Mage Royal of Zindalankh
In conversation with Volo
Year of the Arch

Our look at the Owlhold in the Border Kingdoms concludes this month, beginning with a look around Jester's Hollow, to see why it's become the most popular visitors' destination in Owlhold (and it's not for Jestra's lost treasure, which thus far is something only a few sages know about).

### DOWN IN THE HOLLOW

Descending into the Hollow from the south, the traveler comes first to the home and shop *Belomeier Tathchant, Dealer in Locks, Keys, Chains, Hinges, Coffers, and Lanterns*. Belomeier is a fat and affable man of pleasant ugliness and deft skill, who makes and repairs small and dainty specimens of all the items his sign proclaims. He also sells tiny, razor-sharp daggers with sheaths for strapping onto forearms, into boots, and onto belts. His prices are just slightly above average, but his wares are of the best quality.

Next to Belomeier stands the abode of *Jarvathra Ploorst, Talismans and Fortunes*. In her spicy-scented, cluttered home, Jarvathra—a dreamy-eyed, gushing woman who never seems to sleep or close for business—dispenses all manner of talismans and tells fortunes, specializing in the reading of candles lit by a client and in the interpretation of card games played between her and the client. Her talismans may or may not have any real power to ward anything; some of them are unique mixtures of feathers, carved glass and stones, and smoked leather bindings. Jarvathra has many male patrons who delight in her affectionate, comforting ways, but her oft-used bed is not for sale, and she'd be furious to be considered an escort-for-hire.

Her neighbors to the north, on the other hand, are happy to be sought out as just that. *Dalethra and Tasheera: Twice the Pleasure* says their signboard, though in truth they usually work in shifts rather than together.

Their stone house is decorated like a vampire-haunted castle—all guttering braziers and showmanacles—but has chambers furnished very differently, one resembling a dungeon cell, two others princesses' bedchambers, another a shoproom, and so on.

The two tall, raven-haired and strikingly beautiful sisters were once palace poisoners to a Calishite pasha but now restrict their mixings to the making, use, and selling of "love philtres" that could more accurately be described as ardor-inducing drinks. Dalethra and Tasheera Olombrys do what has politely been described as "a roaring trade," making necessary the hiring of a dwarf doorguard and appointment secretary by the name of Grint Galathammer. Galathammer is gruff, dispenses free beer to those kept waiting, and is as wide as he is tall and as strong as a warhorse. He reports that his employers need more sleep, and he may soon connive with one of the healers in the Hollow to give them enforced vacations by putting them to sleep for a tenday here and there.

One of those healers, *Nalbeth Thortir/Salves and Gentle Healings*, is located next door. Nalbeth is a kindly, gaunt young man who has little skill at internal illnesses—which he freely admits, directing folk with such complaints to Aratha, across the Hollow—but is very capable in matters of staunching bleeding, cleaning and closing open wounds, banishing infections, and dealing with sprains, torn muscles, broken bones, and eye injuries. He also sells a few powerful pain-banishing drinks for those who must continue to travel or work despite pain or nausea, but recommends these not be used in place of proper care. Nalbeth's prices are high, but his work is worth it.

Entirely unembarrassed by nudity and seemingly uninterested in sex, Nalbeth does become alarmed when asked to deal with problems of pregnancy. He'll hastily admit he knows nothing about such things, and directs those who request aid to Erendin of Silvanus.

Next to Nalbeth's little stone cottage is the inn itself. The handsome fieldstone *Jester's Hollow* (Excellent/Moderate), stands on a little knoll at the bottom of the hollow, where a simple bridge crosses Laughing Lady Stream. This wayhouse makes its coins as a resting-place for those who come to trade with the artisans of the Hollow. Apt to be damp (and clammy in winter), it's breezy year-round, bright and pleasant within (all rooms having pleasant window-views and solid, comfortable furnishings), and features a com-

mon heated herbal bathing-tub just off the taproom, where tired travelers can relax and banish the aches of weary feet.

The mint wine is excellent and clears the palate for buttery biscuits, served to all guests. Warm robes are also provided for all, and the staff wear them to encourage such casual dress everywhere indoors. The dining room has a wall of windows that opens onto a little dancing green where harpists, singers, and horn-players often entertain, and guests are encouraged to dance for the fun, not worrying about skill. Those who like the *Jester* tend to *really* like it, and return to stay year after year, whenever they can, lingering as long as possible. It's said that a disguised Azoun of Cormyr had been among their ranks more than once, accompanied by a certain grumbling Royal Magician of Cormyr.

Climbing away from the stream going north, the traveler will next come to the home of *Aratha of the Mysteries/Healing Potions for Sale*. Aratha is a young, plump woman of intense and fiery character, flowing flame-orange hair that brushes the floor behind her as she rushes about, and endless curiosity about her clients and all they've seen or heard recently.

She'll chat in an endless gush of enthusiastic questions and observations as she doles out whatever seems necessary from among her surprisingly effective array of drinkables. These "potions" are sold in a mismatched glass forest of reused and often incongruous bottles (from fanciful perfume containers to former large-guzzle wine bottles from distant royal or noble cellars). Certain clients swear they've imbibed *potions of cure light wounds* from among her wares, though Aratha professes (honestly) to know nothing of magic.

She is quite good at scolding the careless, at diagnosing internal pains and upsets (including poisonings), and at doing what she can to treat them. Aratha knows the basics of birthing and complaints of mothers-to-be, and will summon druidesses (by ringing a special bell) from the nearest grove to set a patient at ease or to assist at an imminent birth.

Aratha's cottage is overrun by many freely-wandering hens, whose eggs she enjoys. She feeds these fowl all manner of special seeds, and some grow to be twice average size.

The lane north of Aratha's leads to a large cottage set among trees; its signboard proclaims it to be the home of the *Wizard's Choice Companions/All Travelers Welcome*. A small army of lady and gentleman escorts retired from city trade shares this house of growing repute, where the style is "relaxed and tender comfort for the weary." Most patrons think the word "wizard" in the name is mere whimsy—but in truth it refers to the great secret of Jester's Hollow: all of its businesses have been bankrolled by, and are under the protection of, a reclusive wizard who wears a jester's costume whenever he appears openly.

This archmage slips *potions of cure light wounds* into Aratha's stock, makes some of Jarvatha's talismans work—and watches patrons come and go, waiting for someone. He's never told anyone who he's seeking, why, or the reason he came to this remote woodland spot to hide. He goes by the obviously-false name of "Tomkins" (a name given to old buffoons in minstrels' plays), but doesn't mind instantly dropping his disguise to hurl spells when brigands or adventurers misbehave in "his" Hollow, so he can't be hiding out of fear.

**Jarvathra has many male patrons who delight in her affectionate, comforting ways, but her oft-used bed is not for sale, and she'd be furious to be considered an escort-for-hire.**

Several of the Companions think he's mad. That may the true explanation—but when one is dealing with the affairs of wizards, any assumption is dangerous, and one of madness doubly so. It's such a glib reason, so easily misapplied to the mysterious. Jester's Hollow may yet erupt with the truth.

## ALONG LONGCRAG RIDE

The traveler crossing southern Owlhold by means of the Ride will find handy pavilions with pumps and sleeping-huts are spaced at regular intervals—but taverns and inns (primarily serving the locals) are hidden down side-lanes that rarely bear signposts. An Owlen guide is recommended for travelers desiring to discover the best amenities along this route.

Most wayfarers prefer to "rough it and rush it," crossing Owlhold as swiftly as possible; this road has something of a reputation for lurking brigands, sneak-thieves, and doppelgangers. Experienced merchants travel in armed parties of ten or more, and warn that these predators almost certainly keep watch over the waystop pavilions to choose prey.

# Archipels: La Guerre des Ombres

This French-language adventure is the first offering in a promised campaign called *Archipels* ("Archipelago") from Oriflam, a new d20 publisher but an established translator of English-language RPGs, primarily *Cyberpunk*, *Feng Shui*, and *RuneQuest*.

The setting is strongly reminiscent of the Dragon's Teeth of Green Ronin's *Freeport* series, being a series of islands left after the destruction of a larger continent in a great war millennia earlier, when the God of Destruction, Arax, and Jareg, a mortal champion, met in a climactic battle that tore the land apart. The evil ones were entombed below the seas, while the remains of the continent became wandering isles. Now one of Arax's generals has found a mortal dupe to open the way to the Lord of Destruction once again.

The player characters start out on one of the larger islands, called Vendrest. They quickly find themselves embroiled in political intrigue and military threat from the mysterious atoll of Nemedia, ending up on a mission to rescue a missing diplomat and gather intelligence. Once on the atoll, they become aware of an external influence on the Nemedian court and must find the hidden temple of Arax to stop an evil ritual.

The adventure provides a lot of nice touches. The setting of floating islands allows widely varying cultures and geography within a relatively small area. Racial stereotypes often get turned on end: warships crewed by fearsome elven gunners, orca-riding goblin pirates, and a clan of aquatic koboldkin are just a few of the interesting characters in store.

Unfortunately, there is also an everpresent, if low-key, sexism. The Nemedians are clichéd amazons, and the cover features an unnecessary ass shot. The government of Vendrest is color-blind when it comes to race, but only men may participate in the council. (Yet somehow, they have elected a woman as their leader.) The authors frequently assume that the PCs are male.

The authors have paid considerable attention to possible actions and outcomes in most encounters, but some of the plot devices are forced. For example, a programmed event is needed to put the PCs into the only situation that can get them to the temple. The finale also leaves little to free will. On the other hand, the authors strongly favor story-based awards and provide a detailed list of "tasks" that earn generous XP—something I appreciate. These are best used in conjunction with more typical combat-based experience, at least for key encounters.

One thing this product falls short on is maps. There is no overview of the archipelago; it would have been helpful to at least show the relative positions of Vendrest and Nemedia. While a small-scale map of one island is provided, there is none for the other, and the layout of the undercity and its buried temple is confusingly drawn in cross-section. The DM has to do quite a bit of work to make sense of the adventure's finale.

The authors demonstrate an imperfect grasp of the d20 system. A random sampling of NPCs reveals basic errors in many of them. A set of Nemedian armor has no cost or creation information provided. A giant riding wasp is nearly identical to the *Monster Manual* creature but has higher saving throws "just because" (it still has no Intelligence score, so how do they train it?). An incorporeal outsider has wildly inaccurate attack bonuses and saves.

All in all, this adventure is an excellent source of ideas to mine for your own campaign, but only a nice try in terms of design. The production values are commendable, though, with generally high-quality interior art and clean layout, and I look forward to the next installment in this series.

—Jennifer Clarke-Wilkes

***Archipels: La Guerre des Ombres***
An 80-page d20 adventure
By Eric Nieudan, Guillaume Chapuisat, and Olivier Durand
Published by Archéon S.A.R.L.
(An Oriflam imprint)
126 francs/19,21 euros
(about $20.00 US)

This first installment of the Archipels campaign pits the PCs against mysterious invaders from a xenophobic culture. Plenty of cool setting ideas and lootable bits, but poor d20 rules knowledge and a lack of clear maps mean quite a bit of work for the DM.

| | |
|---|---|
| Accessibility: | 3 |
| Art: | 4 |
| Design: | 3 |
| Value: | 3 |

# The Book of Eldritch Might

*The Book of Eldritch Might* is the first product released by Monte Cook (author of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil*) under his Malhavoc Press imprint. The 32-page .pdf-format file presents additional play options to arcane spell casters—bards, sorcerers, and wizards ("arcanists" in Cook-speak)—by introducing new eldritch feats, prestige classes, spells, and magic items.

Despite a garishly unwelcome top border along the cover and every page, the graphic design is solid and relatively basic, making it easy to focus on the file's content. The main cover image features a winged ibis-headed figure surrounded by what look like Egyptian hieroglyphs under the cool Malhavoc logo—grasping hands surrounded by black, angular tines. Interior art is pretty dodgy, and consists of one poor black and white line drawing and a few amateurish Photoshop-doctored images that would look more at home in an *Immortal* or *Asylum* rulebook than in a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® supplement.

About two-thirds of the game content in *The Book of Eldritch Might* is good-looking, creative stuff. The other third is dull and workmanlike. A good example of the latter are the spells *flaming corrosion* and *silent sound*, which inflict energy damage based on caster level, not unlike the ubiquitous *lightning bolt*. Such spells fulfill an important function by rounding out the spellcaster's ability to deal damage using the five different d20 energy types (acid, cold, electricity, fire, and sonic), and can be useful additions to any caster's repertoire. While I can appreciate the need to dish out damage based on cold rather than fire when facing a red dragon, spells like *coldscream* are boring, and offer little to the game other than filling out routine "me too" spell slots.

Other spells in the book are simply repetitive variants of the same base spell, with a different elemental focus: *mark of air*, *mark of water*, etc. The five *rods of branding* suffer from similar assembly-line templating.

Other spells didn't work for me because they seem to run counter to the logic of existing spells. *Tongue of angels* and *tongue of fiends*, which grant the caster the ability to use their respective languages for 1 round per level, seem over-powered as cantrips, since *tongues* itself is a 2nd-level bard spell, a 3rd-level wizard/sorcerer spell, or a 4th-level cleric spell. One could argue that making these 0-level spells is appropriate due to their limited usefulness and the fact that they grant comprehension and use of a single language, but I feel that they defeat the purpose of forcing spellcasters to learn *tongues* as they advance in level.

The rest of the book, however, shines with vivid originality. Cook shows his ICE *Rolemaster* roots in particular with the spell-lacing eldritch feats, which add a nice parallel to metamagic feats for non-wizards and provide wizards with additional development potential. Other eldritch feats allow PCs to create magical runes and tattoos, to scry through mirrors, and to brew magical poisons.

Many of the spells expand a DM's repertoire with devious tricks: *hidden object*, *imbue guardian*, *teleport redirect*, *undaunted fixture*, and *zone of speed* offer interesting ways to build out your dungeon environments. Others are simply cool—*teleport tracer*, which allows the caster to know the destination of the most recent teleport cast within a generous area, and *Devlin's barb*, a cantrip that creates "dissolving" ammunition for slings, bows, and blowguns, will increase any character's versatility. Most of the magic items are great, including the minor and major artifacts and the magical poisons. I foresee many additions to my campaign as a result of the ideas that Cook presents, in addition to a certain NPC being re-equipped with a *bleeding sword* and some new tattoos…

Despite what I consider disappointing flaws in *The Book of Eldritch Might*, it is worth the paltry $5.00 price tag. It's relatively easy to ignore or modify its lackluster contents, and its more useful offerings make up for the less-creative spells and magic items.—ALLAN T. GROHE, JR.

***The Book of Eldritch Might***
A 35-page .pdf format d20 Sourcebook
By Monte Cook
Published by Malhavoc Press (www.montecook.com)
$5.00 US

A d20 sourcebook that details new feats, prestige classes, spells, and magic items (including artifacts) for use by arcane spell casters (predominately sorcerers and wizards, with some material for bards, clerics, and druids).

Accessibility: 4
Art: 2
Design: 4
Value: 5

# Evil

Smile and butter up your players with soothing platitudes about heroism, character-development, and plot, but if you're a Dungeon Master, evil is your business. Every time she sits down to play, a DM is tasked to create utter ugliness in a world populated by characters aching to jump off the barstool to smite it. Any supplement that helps to make your evil plots that much more sinister is a boon.

Alderac's *Evil* is such a boon—barely.

Though it starts with a banal overview of what evil is and how it manifests in a typical campaign, the book eventually gets meaty, albeit messy, and stays that way through almost the entire 128-page length. Why messy? *Evil* is a twisted path—the book's stream of consciousness style sees it skipping about presenting a prestige class here, a group of feats there, some flavor text and ideas there, and then snaking its way to more feats and prestige classes. *Evil* contains a little bit of everything: new spells, new monsters, overviews of evil character archetypes, even some wickedly fun notes on how to run an evil campaign.

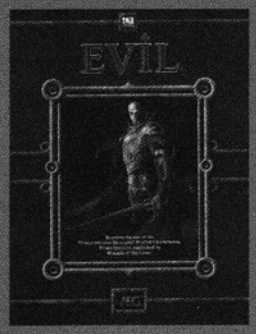
The book opens with a long-winded discourse revealing that a fella can gain power at a price for making pacts with the infernal (who knew?). Finally, with the introduction of Infernal feats, we get to the crunchy bits. And oh, do they crunch! Spice up your character with an Infernal Pact that gives him Multiple Limbs, Undetectable Lies, and Immortality. Most of the feats work rules-wise, though a few are just plain so-so. The Magic Item feat ("you are given a single magic item") is highly variable (and hence highly crappy from a play-balance perspective), while the Wish feat is no better than giving your villain a one-shot magic item. Since it doesn't scale as the character goes up in level, the Wealth feat is just a poor choice unless the character who chooses it is a low-level buffoon.

*Evil* also touts 10 general and special feats, most of which are just okay, while others sound fun but are not feat-worthy (such as Living Shield giving bad guys the expanded—but still almost useless—ability to use their enemies as a shield). The gem of the general feats is Tyrant—a twisted version of the Leadership feat in which bad guys get followers whose loyalty is bolstered by looting cities and having the opportunity to work with fiends—goody, goody.

The demon summoner prestige class is less than prestigious. It can be emulated with two feats and the wizard class, but it does give clerics the opportunity to rake up meta-magic feats—its only real benefit. The other two prestige classes in the book, the blood archer and the bargainer, are better, but both seem more suited for infernal sidekicks than the real villain in a campaign. Since interesting sidekicks often are the enemies of mid-level characters, however, these classes make solid additions to the book.

The most interesting section of the book dwells in Section Two: Mercy is for the Weak, a nice how-to manual for running an evil campaign. I've never played an evil campaign. I always figured it was something that those other (basement-dwelling) guys did, but after reading this section, I've changed my mind. I'm now convinced that you can have a fun, intelligent, and interesting campaign (at least in theory) with degenerate heroes. Even if you're dead-set against this idea, at the very least the section gives plenty of really good ideas for giving fu and intelligent motivations for your bad guys. Sure, evil may be short sighted, but it doesn't have to be dumb.

Personally, I like my game supplements and my evil focused and powerful. *Evil* is neither, but there is enough good in *Evil* to warrant a twenty-dollar expenditure.—Stephen Radney-MacFarland




***Evil***
A 128-page d20 supplement
By various writers, edited by Andrew Getting and Jim Pinto
Published by AEG
$19.95 US

Make a pact with a demon, sacrifice some children, murder a paladin, and reap fantastic experience points and cash rewards with a complete sourcebook detailing motivations and play options for evil characters.

| | |
|---|---|
| Accessibility: | 3 |
| Art: | 3 |
| Design: | 3 |
| Value: | 4 |

# Thievery 101

*Thievery 101: Joining the Watchers* and *The Periapt of Famidon* are the first two products released by Wyvern's Claw Design. Like many second- and third-tier d20 companies, Wyvern's Claw releases their material in .pdf format through their Web site (www.wyvernsclaw.com). Unlike many online d20 releases, however, *Joining the Watchers* and *The Periapt of Famidon* exceed the originality and quality of many in-print d20 adventures.

Both adventures involve a solitary rogue PC in burglary missions on behalf of The Watchers, the local thieves guild. In *Joining the Watchers*, the PC must prove her mettle before being admitted into the guild by collecting some overdue protection money from a local fishmonger. In the second adventure (which assumes the PC succeeded and was admitted to the guild), the PC must case and break into the home of a wealthy moneychanger to recover the *periapt of Famidon*, a piece of expensive jewelry once owned by a prominent druid.

Without spoiling the adventures' plots, both scenarios offer many opportunities to test a lone rogue character without presenting challenges beyond a single PC's capabilities. The urban settings encourage a rogue to case the target, and to consider all available methods of entry. The city setting also allows a rogue's many Charisma-based skills to shine by allowing her to engage in information gathering, fast-talking the local folk, etc. The PC's full thiefly portfolio of skills will be well-tested in these adventures, however, so have no doubt that she will need to scale walls, pick locks, and disarm traps, too.

Some challenges are specifically set at the edge of a 1st-level rogue's abilities in order to force the character to wait in agony for generous rolls while exposed to possible discovery, adding welcome tension to the scenarios. This close attention to plot and design is reflected further within the adventure background through the use of the Eye. The Eye is a higher-level rogue who assigns the PC to jobs, provides background and information, and mentors the character to be sure that she doesn't break the strict codes of the Watchers. The Eye provides continuity between each adventure, and can provide specific feedback to the developing rogue, since he or she observes each mission in disguise.

Unfortunately, some of Wyvern's Claw's attention to detail falters in *The Periapt of Famidon*, in which some key NPC characters are given higher CRs than they ought to have. In addition, a gaggle of distracting minor editing errors appear throughout both adventures. These flaws remain minor, however, and are easily correctable by Wyvern's Claw, given the electronic format of their products.

Both adventures feature similar art and layout. Each page employs the ubiquitous outside-edge banner, over which sidebars detail notes to the DM, new d20 content (magic items, skills, spells), and encounter stat blocks.

I found the art in both adventures to be well-illustrated, topical, and placed well in relation to the surrounding text. The illustrations in *The Periapt of Famidon* improve over those in *Joining the Watchers*, and include a full-color cover that depicts the title piece of jewelry.

*Joining the Watchers* and *The Periapt of Famidon* are priced competitively with AEG's *Adventure Keep* series ($2.99) and Fantasy Flight's *Instant Adventures* ($3.95). However, both of Wyvern's Claw's adventures offer about twice as much content for less cost.

—Allan T. Grohe, Jr.

***Thievery 101: Joining the Watchers***
A 15-page .pdf format d20 solo adventure
By John Merrill and Paul Taylor
Published by Wyvern's Claw Design
(www.wyvernsclaw.com)
$2.95 US

The local thieves' guild sends a brand-new 1st-level rogue to rough up a fishmonger. The adventure showcases the rogue's skills, and will teach the player valuable lessons in caution, trust, and loyalty.

Accessibility: 3
Art: 3
Design: 3
Value: 5

***Thievery 101: The Periapt of Famidon***
A 17-page .pdf format d20 solo adventure
By John Merrill and Paul Taylor
Published by Wyvern's Claw Design
(www.wyvernsclaw.com)
$2.95 US

You've made the gang! Now, your contact sends you to case the home of a prominent moneylender and to steal from him the periapt of Famidon in the next three days. Don't let him down!

Accessibility: 3
Art: 4
Design: 3
Value: 5

# Floor (Plan) Your Players

BY ED GIBSON

The addition of attacks of opportunity to the new edition of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® has increased the need for maps and miniatures to keep track of where the combatants in a melee are located. In earlier versions of the game, the DM could approximate location, but now an exact location is vital. So this month, I'm featuring sites with floor plans, maps, and paper miniatures.

This month's first site is http://www.jsr.com/~fitz/roleplay/props/. The site is rather slow, but has a variety of useful items for gamers—a selection of small cut-out buildings, various floor designs with grids (suitable for making your own dungeon tiles), and some paper miniatures.

Another good source of floor plans and related items can be found at http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Chasm/9223/. Although this site is geared toward players of the *Heroquest* board game, it offers a variety of color floor and accessory designs which can be utilized in roleplaying games. One set has an assortment of sea tiles, including a whirlpool. There are ice caverns and a dozen cave tiles. An ore cart and assorted sections of track can be combined with the cave pieces to present a functioning mine. Two sets of indoor features include such dungeon staples as pit traps and lava streams. Finally, two sets of outdoor features include rivers, pools and other useful items. There are also a variety of science fiction tiles which could be used in *Star Wars* or ALTERNITY: DARK MATTER® games.

Continuing our appropriation of *Heroquest* material for roleplaying, let's visit http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Cauldron/1988/. This site provides a variety of room and corridor overlays which are suitable for our purposes. I'd particularly like to point out Toco's Chapel (http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Cauldron/1988/large/tocoschapel4.JPG). The illustration depicts the yellow stone floor of a room which is covered with indecipherable glyphs and could be used in a campaign based in any time period. The only problem with this site is that a few of the illustrations are in a significantly different scale from the others. However, for the most part, you'll be fine as long as you keep to layouts from this set. I haven't compared the various sets to determine how well they work together, but they appear to be close enough for our purposes.

**Imagine your players' surprise when their adventures lead them to a small farm (complete with outhouse).**

The next site is the home of Micro Tactix: http://www.microtactix.com/new/fun.shtml. The Web site has several sample buildings which you can download for free. They hope you like the material enough to purchase one or more of their Cardstock Creations sets (for medieval, modern, future, post-holocaust or wild west settings). Even the free materials will add excitement to your game. Imagine your players' surprise when their adventures lead them to the small farm (complete with outhouse). Another commercial site is Sparks (http://www.io.com/~sjohn/sparks.htm). I wasn't impressed with their free sample download, but I figure you can form your own opinion.

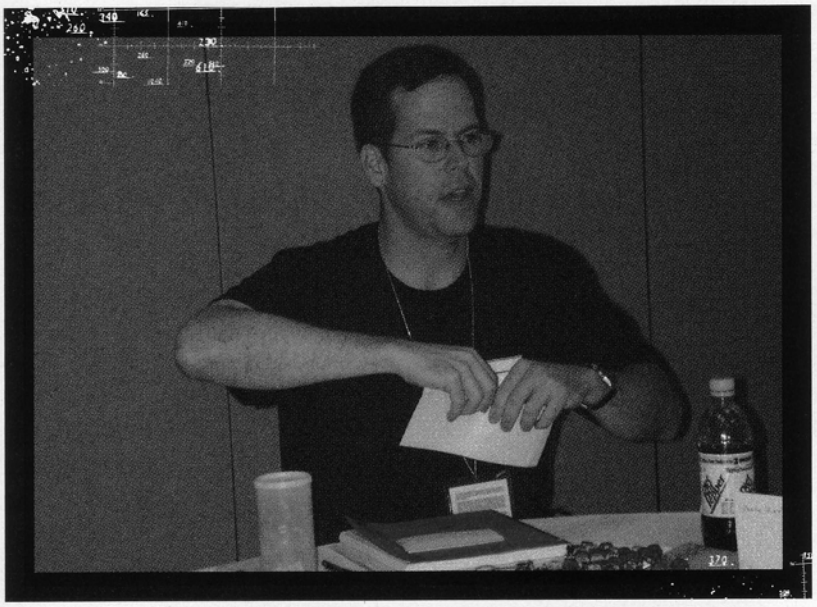
One more floor plan site is http://tamerthya.freeservers.com/25mm.html. This site is different in that all plans are available for free for 28 days, then they are taken off the server and archived. You can also subscribe and receive weekly updates so you don't have to worry about missing anything. They have a variety of interesting subjects coming up, including a DC-3, a railroad locomotive and various train cars, and an assortment of ships. This site is definitely worth stopping by periodically to see what is new.

While we're all waiting for the *Starships of the Galaxy* book to come out for *Star Wars*, here are some sites with deck plans for the *Traveller* game: http://nav.webring.yahoo.com/hub?ring=deckring&dist. These plans could be adapted to other games, but I'm not the person for that job. I remember playing the original *Traveller* during my college days and found that I had more fun creating characters than I did playing the game itself.

Here's one last site for this month: http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Keep/6762/maps/maps.html. It has floor plans, but they are not to scale. However, the drawings can be used to create realistic scenes for your players. The diagrams include multiple versions of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom houses/apartments. Now, every one-bedroom apartment won't be identical to the others, because you have six to choose from. The site also has layouts for a motor home, trailer, and multi-story library.

This column is written to give you ideas to use in your campaigns and get your creative juices flowing. If you run across an interesting site or have a related idea which would benefit other RPGA members, please send it along to Polyhedron@wizards.com.

# The Big Ones in Pictures



Long-time *Polyhedron* subscribers have read dozens of reports from *Origins* and the GEN CON® Game Fair. Eventually, a lot of them sort of run together. Both conventions are huge. Both feature exclusive RPGA® Network events, and both attract gamers from all over the world. These are the Big Ones, the largest US-based gaming conventions of the year. Along with WINTER FANTASY™, they form the cornerstones of RPGA convention-based activity in the States. And they're a heck of a lot of fun. But don't take our word for it. Check out these photos and see what a good time everyone's having.

See you next year at the Big Ones, folks!

## ORIGINS 2001

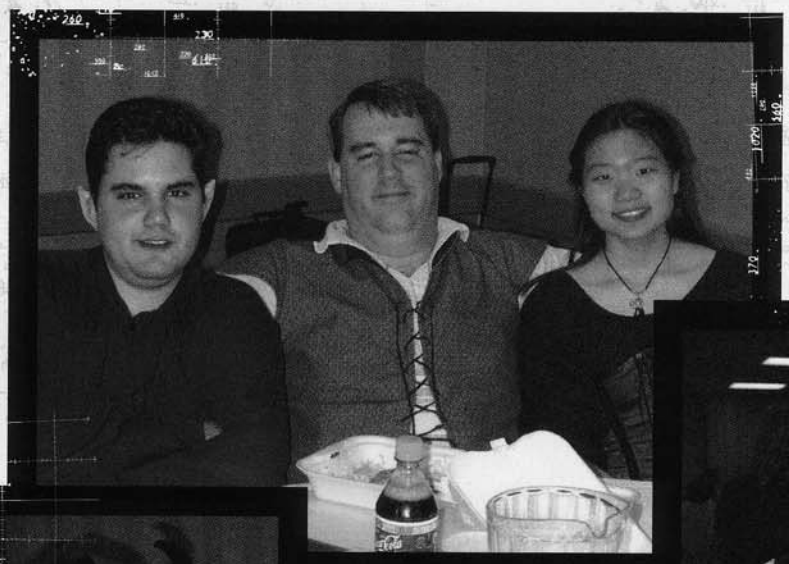
### COLUMBUS, OHIO, USA

### JULY 5-8, 2001

It was all LEGO pirate ships and Elemental Evil at this year's *Origins*. Since the RPGA's old haunt near the food court remained under construction, we held our events closer to the main exhibit hall, which meant shorter treks from place to place during the show. With dozens of tables of active gaming going on in a handful of smaller rooms, the convention seemed both very busy and very friendly at the same time. Gone were the persistent noise problems of the past, replaced with enough room to stretch and much friendlier acoustics.

Highlights of the show included a special LIVING GREYHAWK™ event that took players deeper into the Temple of Elemental Evil, a sort of encore to the very popular *Return to the Temple* event from WINTER FANTASY. Kill rates lingered around 25%, but fun rewards and puzzling challenges made the risk more than worthwhile. Tom Nolan and a host of volunteers really came together with a gigantic LIVING CITY™ pirate battle that used LEGO ships and stuffed aquatic animal menaces. The armada took up a huge slab of floor for most of Saturday, and attracted more than its share of gawkers. A marathon LC interactive saw the debut of the campaign's new magic item creation rules, which kept the LC Board and a cadre of trusted volunteers awake until well past 2:00 a.m. helping characters create their most coveted items.

A lot more happened at the show, including LIVING FORCE™ games and the debut of LIVING ARCANIS. But enough talk! On with the pictures!—ERIK MONA



Return

## GEN CON GAME FAIR

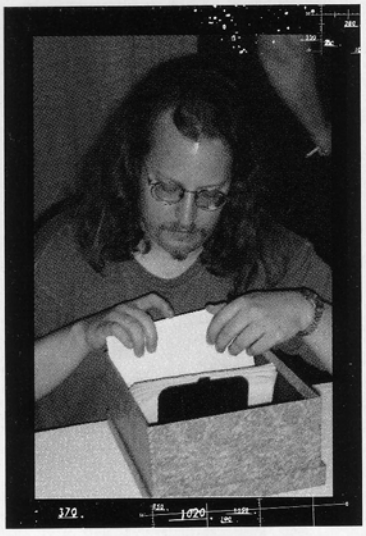
### MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN, USA

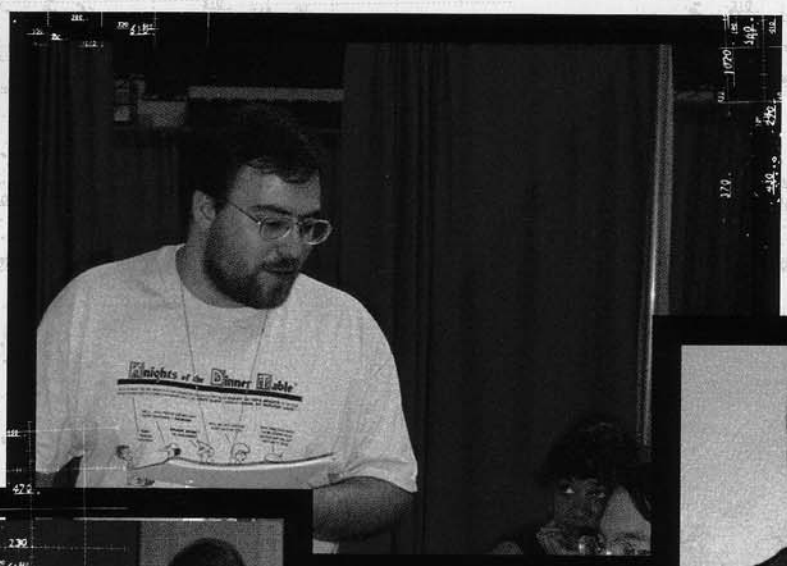
### AUGUST 2-5, 2001

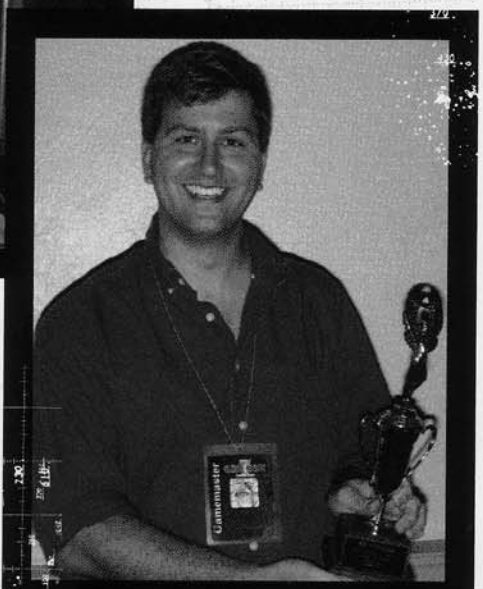
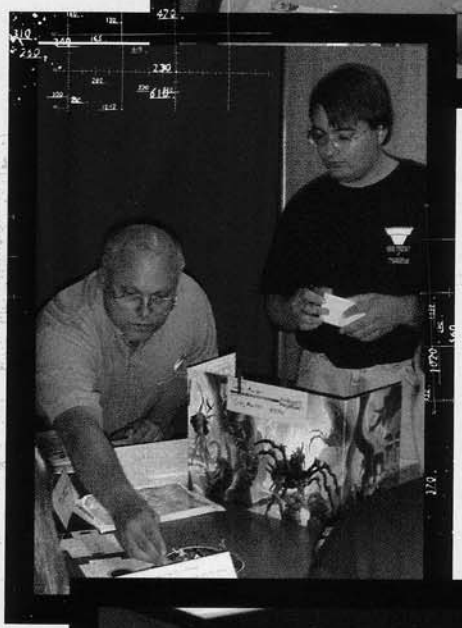
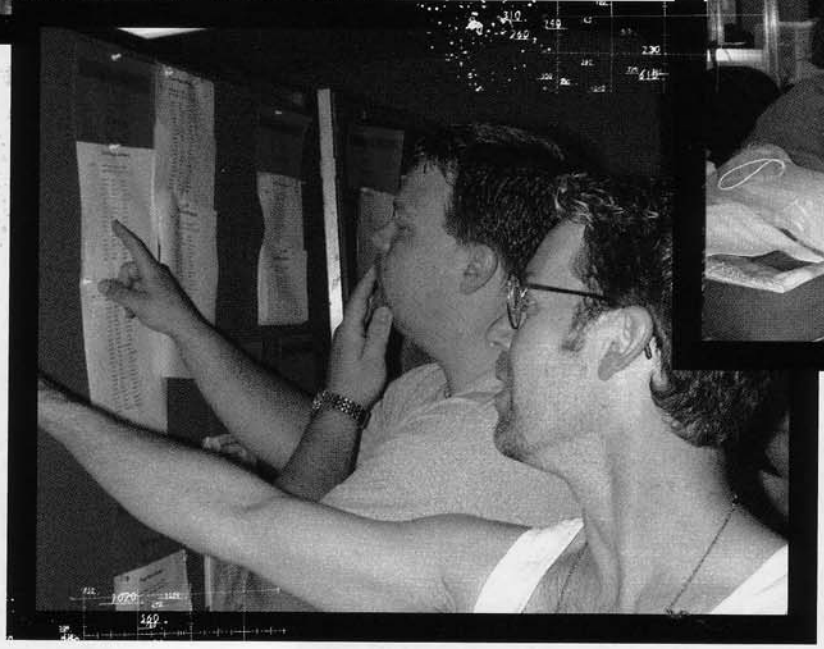
This year's GEN CON started with a bang, as David Wise laid out the future of the Network at the annual Member's Meeting on Wednesday (you can read a transcription of his comments in *Network News*). Once the convention started, RPGA members from around the world flooded the familiar floor of the arena, gaming at more than a hundred tables separated by thin cloth sheets. We ran 1,265 tables of events this year, down a little from last year's total (but hey, we weren't launching Third Edition and LIVING GREYHAWK, either!).

Highlights this year included the debut of the new $5.00 membership, a very, very busy LG Activity Center, at which players could purchase magic items for their characters, and a spectacular LIVING DEATH™ interactive held in the Streets of Old Milwaukee exhibit at the Milwaukee Public Museum. Players of the D&D feature got an early peek at *Deep Horizon*, an Adventure Path adventure by Skip Williams, set for release later this year.

The pictures on these two pages show some of the folks responsible for making GEN CON a tremendous success, as well as some members simply having a lot of fun. Maybe next year, we'll have a picture of you here!—ERIK MONA




Knights of the Dinner Table


Gamemaster